00085713

Digitized with financial assistance from

HT Parekh FOUNDATION

An Initiative by HDFC WITH YOU, RIGHT THROUGH

on 15 October, 2018

SIBERIAN PICTURES.

VOL. I.

SIBERIAN PICTURES

BY

LUDWIK NIEMOJOWSKI

85713
ac

EDITED, FROM THE POLISH,

BY

MAJOR SZULCZEWSKI

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Z C43

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1883.

All rights reserved.

915.7
Mie/Sib
85713

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTORY	1
	PART I.—ETHNOGRAPHICAL STUDIES.	
I.	THE TUNGUZ	7
II.	THE GILLIACKS	39
III.	THE BURIATI	53
IV.	THE SAYANS, MONGOLS, AND YAKUTS	86
V.	THE CHUKCHAS AND KAMTSCHATKANS	114
VI.	THE OSTIAKS	123
VII.	THE TARTARS	136
VIII.	ETHNOGRAPHICAL AFFINITIES	173
	PART II.—SIBERIAN FAUNA.	
I.	FUR-SUPPLYING ANIMALS	223
II.	FOOD-SUPPLYING ANIMALS	247
	PART III.—ECONOMIC STUDIES.	
	RAILWAYS AND AGRICULTURE	261
	PART IV.—HABITS AND CUSTOMS.	
I.	THE FORTRESS OF SNOW	283

SIBERIAN PICTURES.

INTRODUCTORY.

SIBERIA only a short time ago possessed neither towns, nor villages, nor even habitable houses. Her steppes were not traversed by any practicable roads, or varied by arable fields bearing witness to agricultural labour. No trace of a thinking being existed. Wherever the eye ranged there spread an immense desert, hiding in its valleys and innumerable steppes Polar inhabitants completely isolated from the rest of the world. In the west lived the Tartars, in the north the Ostiaks, in the south the Sayans and the Buriati. The centre was occupied by the Tunguz and Yakuts. Their occupation consisted of hunting, fishing, and rearing animals. They migrated from place to place, were governed by

self-made savage laws in which might was right, and unbridled passions ruled their daily life.

To escape the severity of the climate, they either hid in holes or built sheds out of the bark of trees. Their dress was composed of skins of animals. They offered up bloody sacrifices, worshipped strength in animals, light and warmth in the sun, and the moon's power over the sea. Their histories, internal relations, as well as their wars, are a mystery; for, with these children of the desert, traditions carrying facts from generation to generation were completely unknown. As the old man's life waned, with it ended also his past history; and his descendants vegetated in the same monotonous way, not caring to improve their own state, or to take heed of what had happened before their time.

These unknown and solitary countries were conquered by Russia towards the end of the last century, during the reign of Catharine II. With the advancing army, civilization advanced also. Foremost came a great number of people seeking their fortune in colonising these primitive lands; then followed quite as many criminals, whose lot it was to make their home in these polar regions. These new-comers being cognisant of the benefits of culture, sought to adapt

to their new conditions all the latest improvements which they remembered that they had enjoyed in their former state of life. They began to till the land, and to build houses after the European fashion.

These first colonies generally rose on the banks of rivers, or more convenient sites, and gradually increased to the size of villages and towns. With the increase of population, trade began to flourish; handicrafts showed themselves; roads and paths were opened; and the astonished and frightened primitive tribes retired to inaccessible valleys and hitherto untrodden steppes. Such was the state of things a hundred years ago. With the advance of time, however, these tribes began gradually to approach an encompassing civilisation. Many of them became Christians, many entered into trade with the Europeans, a few even, overcome by the new element, adopted European customs. These, however, were more or less exceptions; the greater part remained what they had been for centuries, and the means taken by the government to better their condition proved unavailing. Being accustomed to a migratory life, they refused to build wooden houses, and to settle in the places assigned to them. Passionately fond

of fishing and shooting, they look upon agriculture as irksome; attached to paganism, its superstitions and fierce practices, they are unwilling to accept Christianity, and even when they outwardly call themselves Christians they remain at heart faithful to their old belief. The authorities, unwilling to scare these children of Nature, tolerate many of their habits and superstitions, punishing only some of their wilder and more revolting ceremonies, such as the human sacrifices ordered by their patriarchs, suicides, wilful deaths, and painful tattooing of the flesh. To the present day, the aborigines have, besides the recognized authorities, their own chiefs, who judge their affairs, order corporal punishments, and govern their encampments. The taxes levied upon them are paid in kind, viz., skins of animals. The government somewhat tolerates their paganism, well aware that time and gradual civilization will do more towards eradicating these remains of barbarism than might and persecution.

PART I.

ETHNOGRAPHICAL STUDIES.

CHAPTER I.

THE TUNGUZ.

THE chief place among the numerous Siberian tribes, both on account of their number and their superior intelligence, belongs to the Tunguz. Their encampments occupy the whole centre of the Yeniseisk province, between Turukhansk and the southern border, as well as on the north-western side of the Baikal and the Irkoutsk province.

In my relations with the aboriginal tribes, I became best acquainted with the Tunguz. I inhabited their 'czums' (portable huts), I participated in their occupations and hunts, and, having a slight knowledge of their language, I had better opportunities of understanding their daily life.

The Siberian population, living in proximity to the mines, has joined the Greek persuasion, but, owing to the rare occasions on which they visit

the church (about once a year or so) they are quite ignorant of its doctrines. The Tunguz make the sign of the Cross mechanically, not knowing its meaning. They believe in a good and an evil deity; but in their own encampments they follow the observances of shammism. The only difference, in fact, between these so-called Christians and those who have not received holy baptism is in the names they then receive, which they carefully adhere to in after-life. The inhabitants of more remote regions, not cognisant of even these marks of Christianity, profess solely paganism. When a child is born, they name it after the first object its father happens to see on leaving his hut, such as a tree, river, animal, or mountain. Usually, all primitive nations which adopted this mode of naming their children, and were possessors of an inkling of culture, chose spiritual appellations; but the inhabitants of the Siberian deserts are quite content with the names of objects which present themselves to their senses. The earlier Israelites had names such as Israel (Talking to God), Benjamin (Son of Pain). Among the pagan Tunguz we notice such names as Zug-li (a dog), Zugand (a cat), War-to-a (a mountain), &c. In a word, not a single

appellation indicating a higher mode of viewing the moral part of life is met with.

Of all Siberian dialects, the Tunguz is most like Chinese. In the latter we find a great number of words of one syllable uniting reciprocally with each other, and thus forming various combinations; in Tunguz, likewise, substantives have neither cases nor genders, and verbs have no tenses. In describing virtues, crimes, and things not actually seen, one is often forced to borrow from what is visible; thus 'sham' (black) also indicates crime, baseness; 'si' (white) also means virtue, nobleness, goodness. Other vices or virtues are simply called by the names of the animals possessing these qualities, thus: zug-ten (fox) stands for slyness, duplicity; zug-li (dog) for faithfulness, affection. The sound of the Tunguz dialect so closely resembles that of the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire, that a person unacquainted with these widely different languages cannot distinguish the one from the other.

The similarity of language as well as of features leads us to suppose that this race as well as the Gilliacks are of Mántchur descent. The other tribes, on the contrary, reproduce the Mongol type.

The Tunguz are of medium height, round-faced, with high cheek-bones, their forehead is broad, their eyes narrow and raised at the corners, the nose flat, the lips thick. They neither brush nor cut their hair, and carefully pluck out the beard from youth upwards. The Tunguz women tie their hair up with a strap. Tattooing* has been almost completely abandoned, owing to the strict orders of the authorities, who forbid this painful and barbarous operation; and, if by chance one sees a tattooed face, it is invariably the face of some very old person, who, in days of yore, was able to ornament his or herself in this truly Asiatic fashion.

The Tunguz summer clothing consists of a curiously-shaped shirt, cut out of deer skins, and embellished with coloured beads, and little squares and triangles of metal, and sewn round with wild goat's hair. Their winter dress is composed of a short jacket, trousers, and boots, all made of deer skins. Men and women dress absolutely alike in winter. This dress is getting

* Tattooing amongst the Northern Asiatic tribes differ widely from that of the North Americans. The Carribs and other races of Indian origin make incisions in the skin and fill the wounds with different colours. The Tunguz sew into their flesh the veins of deer, forming in this way various patterns and arabesques.

more and more rare with Siberians living near mines or villages inhabited by Europeans. Here and there one sees them dressed in frock coats, peasant dresses, or an 'aziam' (jacket made from camel's hair), which they get from the miners.

The Tunguz generally remain longest in places abounding in forest moss, affording suitable nourishment for their reindeer. When the moss becomes scarce round his hut, the Tunguz starts to find a new place. Having found it, he returns to his previous abode, collects his reindeer, arms himself with a rifle, a hatchet, and a 'palm,'* and, surrounded by his faithful dogs, travels to his new habitation. His wife remains in the old haunt, and, helped by the children, dismantles the hut, loads the reindeer with it as well as with all her household goods and chattels, and follows her husband, who has made his path known by incisions cut in the trees, and has also cut away the thick wood to allow his wife and her belongings to pass through freely. If this journey takes place in winter, the husband lights a bon-fire here and there, which he takes care to leave burning,

* A 'palm' is a knife fixed on the end of a long pole—a most dangerous weapon when wielded by an expert.

preparing in this way a warm resting-place for his family as well as a sign of the road they have to follow.

All housekeeping matters rest solely with the women. The men occupy themselves in fishing and hunting, and occasionally, should urgent necessity arise, with some trade required in the household, for instance, blacksmith's work.

Their 'chums' (huts) are constructed of a number of thin poles, stuck slanting in the earth, and tied together at the top with strips of bark or with a strap, so that the ends do not join, but leave an aperture for the escape of the smoke from the fire, which burns incessantly in that steppe dwelling. The poles forming the framework of the 'chum' are covered with birch-bark or the skins of reindeer. The hut, when finished, presents the shape of a cone.

As I have observed before, even those who have become Christians still retain pagan ideas, and in all good luck they see the intervention of the good spirit; whilst they ascribe misfortune, illness, and death to the agency of the black or evil spirit. These ideas are fostered by their pagan priests, whom they highly respect and revere. No Christian Tunguz will

undertake anything of consequence without first consulting the priest, who performs all sorts of incantations to propitiate the good spirit—for a suitable remuneration, of course.

The Shamans, or pagan priests, can be either men or women. The children consecrated for that office are taught its tricks from their earliest infancy. They are made acquainted not only with its outward forms and ceremonies, the cabalistic signs which form, as it were, the foundation of their faith, but also with the medical properties of various plants and herbs, with the different ways of forecasting the changes of the atmosphere by the passage of wild beasts across the steppes. This knowledge, gained originally by intense observation of the changes and secrets of Nature, passing from old men to children, exercises a great power over whole tribes; and the blessed light of Christ's teaching, although it has somewhat pierced their darkness, cannot yet warm by its benign light those souls steeped in the errors of paganism.

The dress of the Shamans during their religious practices consists of a zamanick (jacket, trimmed with bugles and spangles), and a high cap surrounded with bells. An oblong drum,

covered with hieroglyphics, is an indispensable adjunct to their incantations. The ceremony begins by lighting a fire, over which stands the priest, holding in one hand a piece of raw meat, in the other a long stick. He mutters cabalistic invocations to the good and bad gods, hitting the drum gently with the stick all the while. After a time, the beating becomes louder, the mutterings assume the form of distinct words; the expression of the priest's face changes every moment. He now bends his head reverently down, and lifts his hands imploringly to the sky, begging the good god to lend his help to the cause for which he is invoked. Then he clenches his fist angrily, curses the bad god, scorns his power, and predicts that the intentions of this bad god will remain powerless. The gestures of the pagan priests during these invocations are so impressive, they so clearly paint the feelings by which he is agitated, be they either of anger, humility, or rapture, that a person perfectly unacquainted with the language cannot fail to detect which words are addressed to the black god and which to the white.*

* In speaking to the white god, the priests use, as far as their very poor language allows, all the names of

The beating of the drum now becomes fiercer and quicker, the priest's voice is raised louder either in prayer or anger, and gradually merges into shrieks, while, with a flaming face covered with sweat, he jumps repeatedly over the flames, froth on his lips, his body convulsed with nervous twitchings. Finally the stick drops out of his hand, his face becomes pale, he falls helplessly on the ground, and, insensible to all outward things, drops into a heavy slumber. This sleep, evoked by nervous excitement,* forms the principal part of the Tunguz incantations, the only mystery of their faith. It is during this sleep that the priest sees the white

animals or articles indicating virtues and good qualities to flatter him. They call him dog (faithful), reindeer (enduring), sun (light), goatskin (soft), &c. On the other hand, they curse the bad god in the foulest language; in fact, they use words which even softened cannot bear translation, so much so that, in the neighbouring villages, the peasants have a saying, 'He abused him as a pagan priest does the black god.'

* Having often witnessed these ceremonies, and attentively observed all the motions of the Shaman, I feel convinced that this sleep is no conjuring trick, but that it is due to the high pitch to which the nerves are strung, and the complete exhaustion which follows these violent shrieks and jumps. I ought to add that the Shaman abstains entirely from food for a whole day before the invocation; thus the weakened body lends itself all the more readily to produce this unnatural state.

god, receives his commands, and on awaking gives the congregation advice and reproofs which are always listened to most reverently.

The foregoing invocations are not the only remains of the past of these nations. All Tunguz, even those who call themselves Christians, very strictly adhere to their pagan observances, and order their lives according to them. Every woman, for example, from the very first pains of child-birth, is considered unclean; the most distant connection with her, conversing with her, assisting her in any way whatever, and even looking upon her, are not only sinful, but are liable to bring most disastrous consequences.

On that account, every Tunguz woman, from the very beginning of labour, is carried to a hut which has been vacated for that purpose, and is there left till her child is born. No one approaches that cursed spot, no one helps the suffering fellow-creature, and, even if the pains extend over several days, the wretched woman does not receive even so much as a morsel of food or a drop of deer's milk to moisten her parched lips. It often happens that these victims of superstition die without seeing once more the faces they love, and all the affection

of the parents, husband, or relations shows itself in shrieks and lamentations *after* her death. This tardy grief always appeared to me as a sort of irony towards the dead, and I have never been able to look without anger on the grief of those whose stupidity thus caused the death of a loved being. The Tunguz, however, were unable to understand my indignation, and, on my speaking to them about it, invariably answered, 'A clean man can never have any communication with an unclean one; white and black cannot be mixed; when night comes on, the sun flees. We ought, therefore, to imitate the sun.'

In this case, superstition is the cause of the barbarous treatment we have described; but the like barbarity is repeated in illness, especially of an epidemic nature, and then its source is the fear which all unknown sicknesses create in these wild nations. Whenever their camps are assailed by typhus, small-pox, fever of any kind, &c., all are a prey to extreme fear. The ill with which some are visited being both unknown and not understood by them, appears both unnatural and 'uncanny.' They trace it to the agency of the black god, and the work of evil powers, and, scared by signs of illness

which neither their medicines nor the invocations of their priests can stay, they leave the sick and dying in the steppes, and take their camp elsewhere, fleeing from an evil which they are too ignorant to combat.

The unfortunate creatures thus forsaken generally die—often from the sickness, but oftener from the starvation; while the healthy ones, panic-stricken, go further and deeper into the heart of the country till the epidemic is quite extinct.

No ties of family or love are able to overcome this barbarous custom. The love of life and the fear of death are stronger here than all noble sentiments; for these sentiments are the work of Christ's teaching, and of the full knowledge of our duties, and they are ignorant of both. The present government is untiring in its efforts to eradicate this savage custom, pursuing and punishing all those who have thus forsaken their friends and relations, and left them to become the prey of wild beasts or to die of hunger. But authorities can only have power where inhabitants are more or less stationary, and they are powerless in the midst of steppes and deserts scarcely trodden by human feet. It is vain to expect that civilized laws and

regulations should penetrate these bleak and dark abysses, when even the vivifying rays of the sun cannot always reach them.

With the exception of epidemics, which the priests cannot heal, and scrofulous diseases, which cannot be relieved on account of the severity of the climate, all diseases are treated with great success by these very priests, with the help of various herbs. The medicinal properties of herbs are found invaluable, not only in ague, fevers, chills, &c., but also in skin eruptions, scurvy, and inflammation of the eyes, which is very common. In many internal inflammations also these herbs are used by them with success. Besides this, these desert doctors can bleed, set broken bones, create perspiration, and sometimes even perform small operations. As a rule, they use chiefly vegetable medicines, in which the Siberian flora abounds. At the same time, the properties of mineral springs are not unknown to them, and the baths they order for some complaints generally prove beneficial. We ought, however, to add that they never fail to combine juggling tricks with their medical treatment, jugglery being one of their chief characteristics; were they to strip this fantastic garb from many very prosaic employments,

their reputation as wizards would be gone, and they would no longer possess the blind confidence of their fellow-countrymen which they now enjoy. All these mutterings, whispered sentences, and conversations with the white god act on the imaginations of the Siberians, and strengthen their faith in the means used for their recovery, and it is a universally recognised fact that a sick man's belief in his doctor often assists his cure. It so happened several times that well-known doctors, in their travels through the steppes, attempted to treat the aborigines in some easily-cured complaint, and failed completely; whereas the priests, in spite of their want of knowledge, effected a cure almost immediately, because the faith of the patient in the efficacy of their supernatural means assisted their efforts.

The Tunguz Christians bury their dead in full hunting dress. This is composed of a leather jerkin and deerskin trousers, with a quiver full of arrows slung across the shoulder. They also lay beside the body the club and palm which he used most frequently in life. They sew up the body in an untanned reindeer skin, and let it down, without any previous ceremony, into a pit dug for it. Having filled the grave up with

sand, they place a stone upon it and return to their huts with faces expressive of deep sorrow. Loud demonstrations of grief take place only when the friend or relative has died a sudden death. They generally choose sandy or stony places in which to bury their dead—places in which no vegetation grows, persuaded that growing herbage would contain portions of the deceased, and animals feeding upon it would thus desecrate the remains.

The method described above has reference to those Christian Tunguz who are, in some measure, accustomed to the European mode of burial. These of them who have not nominally joined Christ's Church proceed in a very different manner. They place the corpse in a hollowed-out piece of wood, and having placed this primitive coffin on four poles firmly fixed in the earth, so as to keep the body from being devoured by wild animals, they leave it in the open air. This barbarous custom is the cause of all sorts of diseases. In the summer, especially during the dog days, the smell of these decomposing bodies, rotting uncovered, poisons the air of the steppes in which the bodies have thus been left exposed. Sometimes, to leeward, the smell can be perceived a mile off.

All the measures hitherto tried, with a view to put down this disgusting custom, have proved unavailing. Relying on the friendship shown to me by these wild beings, I have tried to reason with them about the absurdity of following this ancient custom. I endeavoured to show them by all means in my power that they were injuring their own health. They used to listen to me attentively, and even went so far as to agree with the justice of my observations; but, at the same time, they affirmed that man ought not to live for himself alone; that it was one's duty to sacrifice oneself for others, and especially for the beloved dead, whose 'tengr' (inward soul), if pressed down by earth, would be unable to leave the body freely during its decomposition, and to unite itself with the white god awaiting it.

The food of the Tunguz consists chiefly of reindeer milk, fish, and game. Beef they never taste, although all wild animals, not even excepting the squirrel, the fox, and the wolf, serve for their nourishment. Bear's heart is considered not only a delicacy, but also a sort of charm, imparting strength and courage to those who eat it. Bread is seldom seen in their huts, agriculture being quite unknown to them.

Flour they receive in small quantities from the government stores in the villages situated on the confines of the steppes, where they go once a year to dispose of the skins of the animals they have hunted. One habit only have they adopted from the inflowing civilization which they so steadily repulse, and that is tea drinking. The love of this beverage has, with them, become a passion. For a small square of pressed tea they are ready at any time to give up the most precious thing they possess—a well-tried bow, their best sable, and even their Sunday clothes. Their second passion (but this one took its root centuries ago) is the smoking of tobacco. To this habit both men and women alike are subject, youths and little girls. One may even sometimes see a little child, scarcely able to toddle, with a correspondingly small pipe in its mouth. One of the essential parts of a Tunguz dress, male or female, is an iron pipe, called 'czugli,' slung across the shoulders by a strap, and accompanied by a leather pouch covered with beads of all colours. When tobacco fails them, which frequently happens in distant encampments, they smoke the powdered bark of different trees.

When a Tunguz neither hunts nor fishes, he

generally spends all his time in his hut, occupied in mending his hunting gear or his fishing nets. He always works in silence, surrounded by dense clouds of smoke from his inseparable pipe. The chief amusements on holidays and feast-days are dancing and singing, and sometimes shooting at a target. Their dancing is extremely monotonous. It consists in ten or twelve men taking hold of each other's hands and forming a circle, which slowly revolves, first one way and then the other, to the never-ending repetition of 'e-hor-e, e-hor-e,' which means absolutely nothing, but forms a sort of refrain. Real songs, in the proper acceptance of the word, the Tunguz, in common with all other Siberians, do not possess. When singing, they look at surrounding objects, and name them as they fall under their observation. In these impromptu effusions the imagination plays no part; it is impossible to discover any poetical associations, any comparisons, or even any rhyme. If, for example, they happen to see a river, they sing thus: 'Oh! river, how grand thou art, how broad, how many fish are in thy waters; we ought to let down our nets to sweep the bottom, and divide the fish we catch between the huts

of our encampment. Then, having dried our spoil or ripened it in holes, we shall eat it with relish,' &c. Some of them employ rhyme in singing, and these are considered to be very witty; but the termination they make use of is taken hap-hazard, and the result is devoid of sense.

A rhymed song is something like this:—

'War-ten, war-to-a,
Li-zug-tu e goa,
Ku-man, est-be-ren,
Zór-ma, us-be-ren.'

which translated means—

'A valley and mountain,
Good wolf's skin,
Walks such an one,
Fish are not birds.'

There are some songs, but these are very seldom heard, in which, instead of simply mentioning the names of mountains, rivers, birds flying, reptiles crawling, and such objects as present themselves to the senses whilst the Asiatic bard is singing, the achievements in war or the chase of some ancient hero, a man of great stature, wonderful strength, and terrible aspect, are described. Whether such images are the chance remnants of old tradition or

simply the creation of the singer, it is difficult to determine.

Singing only takes place on religious festivals or holidays. On all other days, the male population without exception goes hunting or fishing, the households being left in charge of the women. In hunting they make use of bows, snares, and sometimes of fire-arms. In fishing they use nets, lines, and spears. The spoils of the chase in the Yenisei government consist principally of the skins of yellow foxes, wolves, and Siberian squirrels, seldom of sables or bears; the latter having migrated further north since the opening of the numerous gold mines. Some animals, such as black foxes, scared by the sight of man, have for ever abandoned places which some years ago were their favourite resorts.

As for fishing, the gigantic Yenisei, with its large and small tributary streams, affords the migratory Tunguz in central parts an inexhaustible source of booty. The quantities of fish they manage to catch at any season of the year is truly wonderful. All the mining establishments, of which there are not a few, are kept supplied by the Tunguz with sturgeon, perch, tench, carp, pike, &c. Travellers from the south pur-

chase hundreds and thousands of stones weight of these in a frozen state, giving in exchange small pieces of pressed tea, tobacco, or common ironware. Having thus disposed of the greater part of their spoil, the Tunguz either dry the remainder or bury it in holes, and, prepared thus, it is their favourite food. Freshly caught fish they never eat.

This tribe, like almost all people living in a state of nature, possesses the virtue of hospitality in a very high degree. The principal faults in their character are, suspicion of everyone belonging to a different nationality, and a leaning to swindling. As regards the attributes of the mind, they stand higher than all the other Siberian tribes. Western culture is more readily accepted by them; they approach more often European settlements; and hopes are entertained that after the lapse of years, when the benefits of civilization begin to attract these savage tribes dispersed in almost inaccessible steppes, the Tunguz will be amongst the first to forsake old habits and superstitions.

Tunguz women are very industrious and much attached to their husbands, although the latter consider their wives more as slaves than as companions. No Tunguz ever carries on a

conversation with his wife, and only addresses her when it is absolutely indispensable.

Every unnecessary word, friendly observation, or confidence made to a wife is considered derogatory to that marital authority which is the highest rung in the ladder of domestic power. The high and unquestioned authority of the head of the house is never disputed, however unjust or cruel may be the behaviour of the husband. The women honour and respect their lords and masters; they obey them in everything, but they have no fear. The husbands, for their part, keep their wives in perfect obedience, at a certain moral distance; but they do not abuse their power. During the long period I spent amongst them, I have never witnessed quarrels or bickerings, still less acts of violence committed by men on their womankind. In the rare cases of disobedience, opposition, or unfaithfulness, a jury composed of the elders of the camp judges and punishes. The judgments of this Areopagus are respected by both sides. In cases, however, of the plaintiff withdrawing his charge, the judgments of the family jury, 'lik-hu,' are considered as non-existing, everything returns to its usual routine, and the husband who has once forgiven his wife never

reminds her of her offence, or in any way makes her feel the fault he has forgiven for ever.

Such are generally their conjugal relations. As regards the children, they love them so passionately, so blindly, that the warmest affection of European parents for their offspring cannot even approach it. It is a passionate frenzy carried to its furthest limits, ungoverned by the voice of reason, unmoved by any outward circumstances, and unquenched by the blackest ingratitude. The following occurrence will show what kind of love is the paternal love of these natives of the desert.

During my sojourn in one of the villages which lay on the very confines of the steppes, and near the ever-changing camps of the aborigines, I noticed an old Tunguz living in the cottage of a poor peasant, who gave him charity in the shape of a piece of bread and a bundle of straw. The Tunguz was very old, being over three score and ten, deaf, and almost childish. His only occupation was to sit in a corner of the general room and to count and re-count his fortune, consisting of a few score of 'bielki' (flying squirrels). This poor spoil, secured by the old man in the autumnal season, was his only joy. He often made mistakes in

his counting, and then he would begin again from the beginning, as if he thought in this way to add to his store. The oft-repeated word, 'tul-tul' (little, little) made one imagine that. From time to time he would fall into deep thought, appear to make combinations, and at last he would murmur, 'Too little; were there thirty more, then perhaps she would accept the present, and not turn me out of doors.'

Knowing how attached the Tunguz are to their desert-life, their huts, their reindeer, to all, in fact, that pertains to primitive habits, I was much astonished to see this old man living in a Siberian village amidst a strange population that could not even understand his language, and in a cottage the owner of which gave him his daily bread, but treated him with more contempt than even the household dogs. Had he no one in the world who would take care of him? Had the elders of his encampment departed from their precepts which made it a duty to offer shelter, food, and raiment to childless patriarchs? All this appeared to me inexplicable. I asked the peasant who gave the old man shelter to explain it to me, and he related the following story:—

The old beggar, who now only afforded amusement to the peasant's children, enjoyed at one time a high reputation among his brethren. Elected by the Tunguz as director of their encampment, he judged their suits, punished the guilty, rewarded the virtuous, and enjoyed general respect and honour. Left a widower, his family consisted of a daughter whom he loved blindly, madly, passionately as only these people know how to love. His love was not even lessened by the fact that the girl, having fair hair and blue eyes, gave indication of a trace of European blood. As years went on, these signs became more and more marked, and the power of blood, which is never at fault, drew her more and more frequently to the villages skirting the Tunguz settlements. The young Tunguz girl preferred the European music to the monotonous sound of the drum, the merriment of the Russians to the apathetic gravity of the aborigines, the noise of the villages to the enforced silence of the settlements. The father saw it all, and used to sigh and sorrow, but dared not oppose the whims and fancies of the beloved daughter, who in the meanwhile slowly acquired all the Russian habits and customs. She learned the language, adopted the

dress, and imbibed European ideas; and when at last, having fallen in love with a young farm-labourer, she married him, after having embraced the Greek faith, the old man, a strong upholder of paganism, cried bitterly, but never by a single word showed his discontent, in the hope that this great yielding on his part would perhaps make an impression on the heart which had hitherto remained dead to all his affection, and would call forth a spark of gratitude and sympathy.

After marriage, the new-made Christian settled in a large house belonging to her husband's parents, and, having identified herself with the members of her husband's family, at once adopted the style of life led by well-to-do Russian peasantry. Neighbourly gossip, Sunday evening parties, all came as easily to her as if she had never heard the rustling of the desert trees, or known the solemn silence of the steppes.

In the first part of her married life she used to see her father sometimes when he came to visit her, but as time wore on she became more indifferent. The new kind of life, new ideas, and the semi-civilization which she, comparing it with the life of her native settlement, considered the summit of excellence, made her feel

ashamed of her origin, and the father who brought it palpably before her became an object of disgust and hate. When she found that he, thinking more of his journeys to his village than of the welfare of his settlement, was deposed from his power, she forbade him her house. The unhappy old man forsook his hut, and, leaving his countrymen, bade good-bye to his past life, and settled in the village where his daughter lived. Her house being forbidden to him, he hired himself out as farm-servant to a peasant, so that he might see her now and then from afar. Accustomed to the immense distances of the steppes, to the freedom of the settlements, the manual labour of the field was irksome to him, and almost unbearable the petty details of the everyday life of a Russian peasant. This was the more so, as, knowing the language imperfectly, he was continually exposed to the anger of his master and the slights and jokes of his fellow-servants. But he bore all with patience and humility. All his sufferings were as nothing compared with the joy he felt when he caught a glimpse of her for whom he had given up so much. Sometimes of an evening, when his work was done, he used to creep stealthily under the windows of the house which contained

his treasure, and, unseen by anyone, he would take long looks at his daughter. At other times, having previously ascertained the road she would take in going to church, he would crawl in the grass and slink behind hedges like a thief only to get a glimpse at her. These moments of happiness sufficed to make up for sorrow, privation, and loss of liberty, and in living only for her he forgot himself.

Years went by in this way, and, as one year followed another, sickness began to weigh heavily on the old man. Unfit for hard work, and sent away by every peasant in succession, he found himself at last all alone among strangers, without work and without help. He knew too well the reception he would get from his daughter to dare to approach her house; he could not return to his old settlement, for the love he bore his child attached him to the spot where she dwelt. What was he to do?

The instinct of blind love suggested a solution, which very likely the craftiest cunning could not have arrived at. Unable to count on his daughter's heart, he determined to rely upon another motive—cupidity. He remembered his old life on the steppes, his celebrated dexterity in hunting wild animals. The hand, unable to

wield an axe, knew well how to stretch a bow; the enfeebled mind, which often failed to understand simple agricultural matters, recovered some of the inbred Tunguz acuteness indispensable in hunting expeditions. And then it was all for his daughter! What could he not accomplish to see her, to hear her voice, to be received in her house? Full of that thought, the poor father dragged out his old bow, found his long-forgotten quiver and arrows, and, having begged a few mouldy biscuits, he started into the desert.

His hope did not mislead him. His confidence in his skill was fully justified; he returned heavily laden with spoil. This time he knocked boldly at the inhospitable door; his daughter, seeing the rich present, allowed him to come in, gave him some tea, and made him welcome. That, which the despair and tears of the forlorn father had been unable to accomplish, was effected by a few skins of fox and sable.

Delighted with the success of his plan, the old Tunguz devoted all his time to hunting, trying his best to get the most precious furs; for, the richer the booty he brought, the more cordial was the welcome of her for whom alone he cared to exist. She, in the meantime, had

grown so accustomed to these constant presents that she came to consider them as her due, and, if storm or rain or any other cause made the old man's spoil less than usual, she received him with scoldings and anger, and would tell him not to dare to approach her with such a paltry present. The unhappy father, blinded by his feelings, returned to the desert, and, drawing on the last remnants of his strength, tried to satisfy the wishes of his ungrateful child. But the task became more and more difficult with growing years. The hand, once so steady, now began to shake; the keen eye grew dim, and increasing deafness often prevented him from hearing the animal leaving his lair. The man who had hitherto overcome all obstacles was unable to conquer the one which inexorable time placed before him in the shape of old age and impotency. At last a terrible moment came. After a month's incessant hunting, he returned with about thirty American squirrels, having been unable to kill a single sable or even a fox. He knocked timidly at the door of his daughter's house, and handed her the furs.

'Only that!' cried she, reddening with anger. 'Only that!' and her eye shone with cupidity

ungratified. 'And you dare to come here with such an offering! Away, old, good-for-nothing pagan. If you come here again, I will set the dogs at you.'

So saying, she threw back at him the skins he had brought, and shut the door in his face. The old man brushed away a tear, and went slowly away, murmuring,

'Kul, kul,' (little, little). 'Had I a few score more, perhaps she might have received me; but I could not, I could not.'

Not knowing what to do, he went begging from door to door, but he was nowhere received. At last a Murzyk, the one in whose house I found him, allowed him to remain in his cottage. This man was neither better nor more charitable than others, but by this show of pity he wished to humiliate his neighbours, with whom he was constantly quarrelling. The object of his charity, having crossed his threshold, became an object of scorn and derision to the elders, and of amusement to the children. From time to time they would throw him scraps on which he lived, and, when forgotten, he would crawl to the tub in which the slops and dirty water were thrown, and so satisfy his hunger. He did not feel his misfortune and humiliation; his

advanced age, and still more perhaps the thraldom of one constant idea, produced an indifference to all outward things, and a species of monomania. For whole days, sitting on a bundle of straw, he would count and re-count the few skins he had, his last spoil, and repeat to himself, 'Too little; had there been more, she might not have turned me out.'

So slowly faded a living sacrifice of paternal love. With this perhaps too vivid picture of a parent's love among the Tunguz will end the sketch of the habits and character of this tribe, and I shall now pass on to describe other neighbouring clans.

Mention should first be made of the Gilliacks, who, although they inhabit the most remote parts of Siberia, and differ entirely in their habits and customs from the Tunguz, yet, from their common descent from the Mantchur, are ethnographically most allied to them.

CHAPTER II.

THE GILLIACKS.

OF all the primitive Siberians, the Gilliacks are the least disposed to submit to settled authority, the most stubborn and refractory in refusing to obey the mandates of the law, and the most obdurate in rejecting the polish of social order. Their exceptional situation is the sole cause of this. The other North Asiatic nations have been under Russian rule for more than a century, whilst these, living on the banks of the Amoor, a neutral territory belonging to no one, have become accustomed to perfect freedom. Not for long has that part of the world been accessible to anyone, not indeed for more than twenty years. Not only did there exist no frontiers, but the two neighbouring empires did not know accurately what distance

separated them, and what was in the interior. From the Siberian side, as well as from that of the Celestial Empire, stretched out uninhabited deserts, with their steppes, their gigantic cedar-forests, their endless prairies. Beyond these, as in a fortress made by the hand of Nature, lived a tribe recognising no authority, shut up in itself, untouched by neighbouring influences. Sometimes a few of them reached the nearest Chinese province, to exchange for other wares the furs they had taken, and here ended all their relations with the south. The north they did not know at all. If at any time a Russian merchant, led by the hope of gain, set out for their inhospitable country, he never returned again, and his fate was an unsolved enigma to his family and a warning to those who might wish to imitate him. In the seventeenth century, before Siberia was annexed to the Russian Empire, the Russian colonists living on the borders of the Sea of Ockhotsk wished to enlarge their connection in the exchange of articles for raw products; but they paid dearly for their temerity. Attacked by numerous hordes of enraged savages, they were almost exterminated, and died in frightful tortures. The few who were able to escape were so terrified by

this catastrophe that the remembrance of it remains to this day among their descendants.

Since that time the Gilliacks have been left in peace; they lived in their desert, unknown to any, unbound by any outside tie, till 1856, at which time they came under the power of Russia. This year is an era in the history of the colonisation of Northern Asia. The fairest land, hitherto unknown and neglected, became incorporated with the empire without a shot having been fired, without the use of force or harsh measures. All that happened then was the natural result of that strength which moral superiority has over political unfitness.

The Chinese, it is true, wished to oppose it, and collected troops, but their plans struck on a diplomatic rock. Instead of bayonets they saw a pen, instead of a battle-field a parchment. Their craftiness was anticipated, their cunning over-reached; and the sight of a regular army waiting in silence the result of the negotiation settled the question.

The Gilliacks, hidden in their inaccessible dwellings, knew not that their destinies were being fixed. They only comprehended the situation when they found themselves subject to an authority which drew them under

its general social laws unknown to them.

All would have gone well, and that rich land would have at once become the pearl of Eastern Siberia, had it not been for the fault of the first administration, which set back for a number of years its industrial developments.

The Cossacks sent there, by demoralising the population, have become the chief stumbling-block to the progress of agriculture and commerce. The present state of things is radically different. The energetic but careful measures taken by the authorities are already bearing good fruit. The bringing in of Western populations has made agriculture to be considered in some places as a customary labour; and the gold mines are raising long dormant commerce and rousing the people to real life. Having on one side populous China, on the other the Ockhotsk Sea and the vicinity of Japan, the conditions are promising for this part of Siberia becoming one day an important position for commerce in Northern Asia. Already in Saghalien Island and in the valley of Tyna, fairs held every year are much more animated than formerly.

Besides the Gilliacks who dwell there, the Mongolians and Chinese congregate, and rich Japanese merchants come in their ships laden

with goods, Russian traders from Ockhotsk, Kamtschatka, and even Irkoutsk are to be seen, and the exchange of goods brought by these different nationalities is carried on now on a much larger scale.

But these budding signs evoked by an improved administration, and giving hope for the future of the Amoor countries, work but slowly at present. Immense labour and a long time are required to awaken those souls shut in from all outward influences, to the wants of social life, without which it is well known that all efforts to promote the happiness of a nation are of none effect. Amongst the Gilliacks sociability does not exist. In the huts of the Tartars and Yakuts, and in the migratory dwellings of the Tunguz, in addition to the family ties, one can perceive the thread uniting these dwellings into one whole settlement. Among the Tartars a great many settlements belong to one elective kniaz (prince). The Gilliacks have nothing of the sort, they live in separate families, having no connection with each other. Every cottage, built after the Chinese fashion, is surrounded by a palisade, and situated far apart from any other. In these houses the patriarch or head of the

house constitutes the highest and only power; everything which is done there is dependent on him, and in obedience to his decrees. He has even the power of punishing with death members of his family without any control from without. There are, however, besides the patriarchs, the Drankins, or heads of universally respected families; but this dignity, although heirarchically greater than that of the usual patriarchs, is in reality a merely honorary title, carrying little or no real authority. The Gilliacks have recourse to the Drankins on the rare occasions of quarrels arising during the religious festivals, or to ask advice in intricate questions of household disagreements. They are not, however, bound to follow the advice thus received.

This absence of sociability makes them still more shut up within themselves. Nothing pierces the palisade surrounding their dwellings; neither the wail of pain, nor the groan of the dying, nor the despairing cry for help. A mystery covers their family life, impenetrable not only to the stranger, but even to their own countrymen, unless they be near relations.

Their character greatly impedes the formation of a whole out of these scattered units;

descended from the Mantchurs, connected with the old Kamtschatka and Kalka tribes, they have imbibed from these nations all their bad qualities. The Chinese gave them their craftiness, the Kamtschatkians their icy insensibility to all outward influences; and from these primitive elements has developed a strange type, unlike all the other primitive nations of Siberia. He who should try to fathom their character, would undertake a useless task. Under the present government, one can get into the very heart of their country, and pass through the length and breadth of the Amoor provinces; but this will not bring him the knowledge of its inhabitants. Even after having penetrated the palisade, separated each Gilliack dwelling from its neighbour, one finds out nothing. All the dramas of family life are carefully hidden from the eye of the visitor, and no one can read joy or sorrow, nor any other feeling that governs their life, on their lean, bony faces.

Last year, one of the higher police officials, making excursions into the interior, with the object of looking after general order and regularity, and exercising supervision over excesses proceeding from ignorance, found himself by accident in a Gilliack cottage a few

minutes after the father, according to their barbarous law, had sentenced and put to death his own son. The patriarch, hearing a knocking at the gate, threw his 'dacha' (overcoat made of reindeer skins) over the still quivering limbs of his victim, and ordered the gate to be opened. The police officer, on entering the hut, saw him occupied in carpentering, his wife quietly performing her household duties, and the children playing merrily among themselves. From the old man down to the infant, they were all acting a comedy, simulating in a masterly fashion domestic peace. Not a muscle of their faces trembled, or evinced horror, sorrow, or anxiety, even a little boy, five years old, sitting on the bench beside the freshly-murdered brother, smiled so sweetly, so childishly, as only these little innocent beings can. The new comer looked round, and read nothing in their faces, but his keen sight, accustomed to take in all secondary circumstances, discovered blood stains on the floor.

'What is the meaning of this blood?'

The Gilliack's wife picked up from the ground a freshly-killed puppy, which her wary husband had killed by one stroke of the chisel while the gate was being opened.

'It is for roasting,' she said.

The officer turned away in disgust from such a gastronomic delicacy, but he knew well that dogs, and especially young puppies, were the favourite food of the Gilliacks. Not having found anything suspicious, he was on the point of leaving the cottage, when he perceived the reindeer coat shaken by the last convulsions of the murdered son.

'Forgive a sinful man,' said the father, guessing from the direction of the officer's eyes the question that was rising to his lips. 'My son is too fond of opium, and his state is fearful. Judge for yourself.' * And he stepped forward, pretending to be about to uncover his son's body, but the officer, disgusted at the idea of seeing a form covered with foam and having the bestial expression common to all lovers of that narcotic, made a sign to stop him. 'No, it is enough;' and he left the cottage, little suspecting that only a few minutes before his arrival, in this seemingly quiet home, before these playing children, a fearful drama had been enacted—the murder of a son by his own father.

* The Gilliacks, from their close proximity to China, have acquired the habit of getting drunk on opium.

It was months afterwards, and through a chain of quite unexpected circumstances, that the authorities became acquainted with all the details of the crime.

The outward aspect of the Gilliacks perfectly corresponds with the mysteriousness of their character. Tall and thin, there is something diabolical in the aspect of their slanting eyes, shaded by bushy eyebrows. No smile of mirth ever breaks over their lips, and on their features appears only a sneer. Seeing them walk, one fancies they are ghosts; their smothered voice has a hollow, unearthly sound; in the most ordinary relations with them one does not know how to act or what to do. The shrewdest man, seeing these cold, stiff, bony, almost inhuman forms, is lost in speculations, and unable to solve this living sphinx riddle.

They have imitated the Chinese in the building of their habitations; and while the Tunguz, Yakuts, the Tartars, Ostiaks, &c., all live in huts or holes dug in the ground, the Gilliacks have for many years built cottages of carefully-worked wood. These cottages are very large and tolerably high, with a sort of Chinese turned-up roof. Each has but one room, measuring from thirty to fifty feet square. All

round the walls are broad benches, and in the very centre is a hut serving as a house for the dogs, which they keep in great numbers. On the beams supporting the roof are hung nets, traps, and various hunting implements. Besides fishing and hunting, which form the chief occupation of all savage nations, they devote themselves to carpentering, which they have learned from their neighbours, the Chinese. They are very expert at this, and make all their household utensils not only strongly and well, but also with a certain artistic beauty. Some occupy themselves with carving wood and even stone, and produce statues of gods and figures of animals which serve for their religious festivities and for decorating their houses. In each house lives only one family, consisting sometimes of forty persons, of all ages and of both sexes, and subject to its head or patriarch.

Their religion is pagan, but, besides the rites and ceremonies I have already described, they have various others which do not exist amongst any of the other Siberian tribes. In addition to the white and black gods, they worship several animals, and more especially the bear, seeing in it the embodiment of power, strength, and fearlessness.

The strangest article of this faith, and, I imagine, unique of its kind, is that the sacred bear is kept in a place apart, and for a whole year they bow down to it, bringing to it the choicest morsels and the freshest combs of honey. In the autumn they kill it. The day on which this takes place is their greatest and most solemn feast, and is called the Bear Feast. On this day all the Gilliack families, living generally so apart, with their patriarchs at their head, leave their houses and perform a pilgrimage to the place where this very solemn rite takes place. The Drankins, from their hierarchical precedence, take the first place; the priests perform the sacrifice, and all the families present, standing in silence, witness the ceremony. Even then the lines of distinction separating the various families are not broken; they regard each other with suspicion, casting cold, sarcastic looks which are their stereotyped form of expression. After the sacrifice is ended, and after having partaken of a portion of the sacred bear, which is handed to them by the priests, they disperse and return to their cottages, and pursue for a whole year a sort of enchanted, fairy-tale life under the unlimited sway of the patriarchs.

The country situated on the banks of the Amoor, the chief dwelling-place of the Gilliacks, is the fairest and richest province of Siberia. This primitive land, which has never known plough or sickle, produces fruits of all kinds, and hides in its womb the most precious stones, the richest minerals. The climate is warm, the vegetation luxuriant; the pure and healthy air acts beneficially on the Russian colonists settled there; the scenery, wondrously beautiful, does not possess the weird, wild look seen in the Sayan Shan Mountains on the Mongolian frontier, or in the Altai beyond the Baikal provinces. The broad Amoor flows through green meadows and deep, gigantic cedar forests, now breaking into waves over rocks rising in its course, now rolling peacefully and majestically over banks of glistening gold-bearing sand. Besides the Amoor territory and Saghalien Island, a small number of the Gilliacks occupy the lands beyond the Baikal and the northern parts of Japan.

Near the source of the Amoor, and towards the mouth of the Angun, an offshoot of the Gilliack tribe may be met with in a people called Samager. This small branch is ethnographically very little known, for centuries they have been paying tri

bute to the Chinese, and are heavily oppressed by them. A long course of ill-treatment, humiliations of every description, and the severity of the mandarins in exacting the 'haratz' has made the people humble, timid, and stupid; the wish to free themselves from such slavery pushes them insensibly into the arms of Russia.

A few years ago, when efforts were made to establish a point of communication between Nicolaievsk, Amoor, and Irkoutsk, Mr. Berezin, the agent of the Russo-American Company, entered into relations with the Samagers, and first discovered this tendency. He was received everywhere with open arms by the whole population, headed by their patriach, Elgin-ha; he saw signs of friendship for his government, and ill-feeling towards the Mantchur. It is to be hoped that this feeling will be utilised, and that this long-oppressed people will be annexed to a country which will give them the security and protection of established laws.

CHAPTER III.

THE BURIATI.

HAVING now discussed the Gilliacks and their offshoot, the Samagers, let us leave the banks of the Amoor, and, going westward beyond the Baikal, observe the races living there.

The Buriati, who occupy this part, descending from the Ural-Altai race, form a totally different type in the many-coloured kaleidescope of savage nations inhabiting the vast expanse of Siberia.

The Tunguz are hospitable and friendly, the Gilliacks mysterious and reserved, the Buriati are distinguished by their hatred to everything novel; they are shameless and unblushing in their vices.

Their wild nature and unbridled passions

make these people open and fierce banditti. They like to kill for gain, but, even when they know that the crime will bring them in nothing, they will kill for the gratification of their barbarous lust for blood, for the pleasure of seeing the torture of their victims, and to enjoy the sight of his last agonies. Nothing is sacred to them, neither kindness nor services rendered to them have any effect. Gratitude they understand not; hospitality is unknown to them. In every new-comer they see an enemy whom they dare not look straight in the face; and if by chance their wild, wavering look meets the eye of a stranger, it immediately lights up with such fearful fire, as if it had discovered a place in the breast where to strike with effect. Unluckily for them the local laws do not tolerate these bloody pastimes, and all are punished who are caught in such acts. Some years ago the prisons of Irkoutsk were constantly full of Buriati brigands, who, when sent before the judge, could not understand why the police and officials, not being related to the victims, should persecute and imprison them.

'You are neither brother nor relative of the dead man,' a Buriati said one day to the judge, 'what business have you to interfere in the

matter? I don't know you, and you don't know me. Why don't you leave me alone?'

Now they understand that in the interest of general security men are appointed as guardians of public safety to protect the oppressed, even though they be not relations nor friends. This institution still appears to them savage and unjust, but still it exists, and to avoid the punishment of prison or work in the mines they no longer kill the first man they meet, but hunt the Bradiagas or escaped criminals.

Criminals escaping from the mines, liable, according to the law, to be captured, and, in case of resistance, even to be killed, have become the lawful prey of these wild huntsmen. Where in the steppes will a witness be found to swear that the death of an escaped criminal was a deliberate murder, and not done in self-defence? The convicts, who are objects of terror in the inhabited parts, can with difficulty cross the Baikal countries, as at almost every step the Buriati are hidden behind trees, or crawl in the grass, bent on taking their lives. Man-hunting has an irresistible charm for them, though they never own to it, and always try to make one believe that commercial speculation is the sole object of their ex-

peditions. 'The skin of a squirrel,' they say, 'brings us only five copecks' (twopence), 'whereas the poorest rags of a slain man come to at least twice as much.' This plea, which, in their way of thinking, makes a murderer only a man who seizes every opportunity of earning a penny, is merely a cloak under which they try to hide their irresistible thirst for blood. Whenever news spreads that a convict has escaped, they abandon their chase of the sable, fox, or deer, whose skins would bring them large profits, and, mad with savage passion, they hide behind trees, where they remain for whole days, suffering cold and hunger, insensible to everything, and wait for the passage of the miserable being, that they may enjoy the sight of his dying convulsions. Sometimes they get severely punished for their bloody deeds, and the criminal records of Irkoutsk contain many examples of this.

Some years ago, there lived a Buriati called Satz. He inhabited a hut by himself, had no connection with anyone, and was universally considered a great hunter. But hunting, in the ordinary sense, was to him only a secondary occupation. All his time was spent in man-hunting. Three score and ten years of age,

he was strongly built, and gifted with piercing sight. With his gun and a carefully-trained dog, he would lie in wait for the escaped convicts; and never did one of these unfortunate men escape with life. When his gun failed, his gigantic dog, savage and admirably trained, was brought into requisition. Once this Buriati, whilst lying in wait in the bushes, saw two poor wretches coming towards him. When they got within shot, he fired, and one fell dead, shot through the heart. His companion, seeing what awaited him, threw himself into the bush, and ran as fast as his legs would carry him. Seeing this, the barbarous old man, sure of his triumph, smiled a fiendish smile, and, untying his dog, pointed in silence the direction that he was to follow. The dog sniffed the ground, gave a bark of joy, and followed the trail. Several minutes passed in mute expectation. Satz listened attentively to the retreating voice of his helpmate; at last every sound ceased, and silence reigned around. Hours passed, and the dog did not return as usual to lead his master to the spot where lay the corpse of the man he had mangled and mutilated.

The Buriati thought that perhaps the rapidity

of the flight had somewhat retarded the moment of the man's death, and, sure of success, he was waiting patiently for the return of the savage animal.

Meantime the convict, hearing the barking, and guessing that he was pursued, ran with almost superhuman rapidity, straining every nerve to preserve his life. But all availed him little; every moment lessened the distance between him and his pursuer, till at last, tired and worn out, he felt a sharp pain in his leg, caused by a bite from the dog. Pain and despair gave him new strength; he stopped suddenly, and, wheeling round, caught the monster round the throat. The fight for life or death was fearful, but short; dog and man fell together to the ground, the latter crushing the dog's throat with all his might, until at last the mouth opened, its foaming tongue hung out, and, after a fearful convulsion, it lay senseless on the ground.

Most men in a similar situation would think of nothing but the further preservation of a life almost miraculously saved, but the Bradiaga had another object. As long as there was danger, he defended himself manfully, but, the terrible moment over, his thoughts turned to

the feeling which is dearest to these outlawed creatures, viz., to vengeance—fierce, unmitigated vengeance. Impelled by this passion, he stretched his aching limbs, wiped the streaming blood from his wounds, and, gathering up his remaining strength, he moved, or rather crawled, towards the place where the murder was committed.

Satz sat under a tree waiting for his dog, and, with his hand to his ear, listened attentively for the first faint barkings of his favourite. Seeing the savage old man, the convict shook with rage, his eye shone with a sinister light. Concealed by the long grass, he crawled in silence, holding his breath, till he reached the murderer; then he seized the gun propped against the tree, and threw it far away, and, catching hold of the Buriati off his guard, hurled him to the ground and bound him scarcely resisting.

What passed between the man-hunter and the fugitive, who from victim had become executioner, it is impossible to describe. These are things from which the mind revolts, at which the heart turns faint, and the blood runs cold. One thing is certain, however, the convict did not come there to kill at one blow the

murderer of so many of his companions. He wanted to 'play a little;' and it is well known that convicts know how to vary such pastimes. The joy he experienced at seeing the agonies of the enemy of his kind was so great, so inexpressible, that, beside it, all his life of imprisonment, his flight and fear, seemed colourless, and not worth the trouble. Having fulfilled his vengeance he went to Chita, the capital of these lands, and gave himself up, saying, 'I have escaped from the mines. On passing the forests beyond the Baikal I killed a Buriati; judge me and shoot me. I wish nothing, I expect nothing, I am happier than any man in existence.'

Following his directions, the police found the spot where the above described drama had been enacted, and the body of the murdered man, with the tongue and eyes cut out, spikes driven in behind the nails of the hands and feet, the skin flayed from the back, and the limbs half charred from having been roasted alive at a slow fire. The agonies endured by the old Buriati before his death must have been long and fearful. Further search brought to light the old man's hut, and in it was found an extraordinary collection of one hundred and eighty-six tin pipes, which are generally used by the

convicts. This collection clearly proved that the fiendish old man had caused the death of as many convicts who smoked—the number of his victims who did not smoke it is impossible to guess.

I ought to add that the convict who revenged his fellow-sufferers in such a cruel manner did not meet with the death that he seemed to court. He was sent back to hard labour, where, working incessantly under the knout of the policeman, he consoles himself by seeing the effect his bloody action has over his associates.*

The outward aspect of the Buriati tallies perfectly with their brutish nature; tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, covered with black hair, having flat faces, in which the nose and eyes are hardly to be seen, they represent the type indicated by Darwin, and lead one to suspect the existence of a creature which is no longer an animal and yet is not a man.

Their habits, mode of living, and character place them much lower than any other primitive Siberian races. They have no stamp of humanity, no sign indicative of the smallest intellectual

* This story is taken from the criminal records of the Irkoutsk police-courts.

tendency; idle and lazy in the highest degree, they do not trouble themselves about their comforts or requirements, and take no heed for the morrow. They seek food when hungry, change their clothing when that in use is becoming devoured by insects, and take refuge in their huts when driven there by rain or snow. Dirt-loving, neglect, and bestiality are shown in all their actions. Their dwellings are entirely unlike those of the Tunguz or the Tartars, and, of course, in a still greater degree unlike the large Gilliack cottages. They are formed of a few branches carelessly stuck into the earth, twined together, and covered with a sort of wooden roof. A square opening in the branches serves as a window and as an outlet for the accumulated smoke. In these disgusting hovels, amidst stench and filth, they live with their domestic animals, sharing with them both food and bedding. The only occupation which unites them to the habits of other people is the breeding of sheep.

The very extensive and fertile meadows stretching beyond the Baikal, and the ease with which large flocks of sheep can be kept without care or trouble of any kind, has made shepherds of the Buriati. Their days are spent

lying in idleness, whilst their possessions are left in charge of their faithful dogs, who perform the duties assigned to them very much better and more honestly than their masters, owing to their indolence, ever could. Their dress consists of three leather jerkins, put on one over the other, and covered with a large cloak, also made of leather. The women cover their heads with small round caps, made of blankets; these caps and their long, plaited hair constitute the sole difference in their dress from that of the men.

In analysing these wild, dirty races, more animal than human, the question naturally arises whether this brutish state proceeds from its very nature and the poverty of its moral powers, or whether it is the result of a baneful influence produced by the surrounding atmosphere of crime, and all kinds of filth, moral and physical. Opinions are divided on this head. Some maintain that man's nature, no matter to what race he may belong, is the same, and that his surroundings only—the mode of life, ideas, and precepts instilled from youth up—make him a hero or a criminal, a madman or an ornament to society.

It is impossible to disagree entirely with this

theory. We all know how early impressions influence us in after life. But, on the other hand, we see natures so stubborn in rejecting what is good, or so firm in resisting the evil which surrounds their childhood, that, whilst admitting the power of outward influences acting on character, we find it difficult to believe in attributes derived solely from the blood of ancestors. This is true, not only of individuals, but of nations. As an individual gets his first impressions by education, so does a nation receive its character from its political state; but, at the same time, both the nation and the individual possess something in their blood, in their very essence something which belongs to them alone, and which cannot be either altered or obliterated.

As an example of this last theory, I will relate the following circumstance:

Some twenty years ago, one of the higher administrative officials in Eastern Siberia was travelling on duty beyond the Baikal. Wherever he went sad and painful feelings were awakened in him; the idleness, the dirt, and, above all, the cruel instincts he saw the evidence of, shocked his Christian and philanthropic mind, and he could not witness without horror such

unqualified degradation. He tried here and there to influence the natives by kindness and gentle persuasion, but the Buriati, with their vile natures, repulsed all his advances. He was everywhere treated as an enemy, and, had it not been for the protection of a numerous guard, he might have paid for his generous intentions with his life. Disheartened by ill-success, and embittered by opposition, he was returning to Irkoutsk, turning over in his mind what means might be taken to eradicate the evil that devastated a fair and rich land, when, on passing near an abandoned hut, he saw a little boy about seven years of age crying bitterly. To jump out of the carriage, and, with the aid of an interpreter, to ascertain the cause of his grief was the work of a moment.

'How am I to help crying,' said the little one, 'when I am left alone in the world?' So saying, he pointed to the dead body of a man. 'That is my father,' he added, sobbing. 'He is dead; and some time ago my mother died too, and I don't know what to do.'

The officer, touched by so great a misfortune, kissed the sobbing child, and said,

'Then you loved your father very dearly?'

'I did not love him; he used to beat me. I

love no one. I cry because I don't know what is to become of me.'

These words somewhat cooled the philanthropic ardour of the officer, but on reflection his thoughts took another direction.

'Who knows,' he said to himself, 'what effect good example and careful training might have on this wild child of the desert. Let us try. Would you come with me?'

'To the devil himself, were he to feed me,' said the boy.

This was the beginning of the young Buriati's career, known a few years ago as a dandy and a favourite in the best society of Irkoutsk. What his end was we shall soon see.

Mr. —— fulfilled his intentions towards the orphan honestly. Being a childless widower, he adopted the boy, and, when the young man had finished his education at Irkoutsk, he was sent to the Ecole Centrale in Paris.

The Buriati, endowed with wonderful abilities, made great progress, and his protector used to say to his friends, 'You will see what I shall make of him; all the silly theories about the instincts of blood and the inbred moral difference in races will at once be knocked on the head. This living example, which I shall pro-

duce before the world, may become the instrument in the regeneration of the Baikal tribes; let us civilize the savages, and they will soon become useful members of society.' And our philanthropist, giving the rein to his imagination, like La Fontaine's milk-woman, already saw in the future the wild steppes stretching beyond the Baikal transformed into a flourishing province, their savage, bloodthirsty inhabitants peacefully occupied with commerce and art, and their frail huts transformed into houses, villages, and towns. In imagination, he even endowed the inhospitable land with schools and higher institutions, and transformed its brigand-like people into philosophers and law-givers. He had even a project ready to put into the Moscow papers, 'Popular schools in the land beyond the Baikal.'

Whilst he was thus lost in dreams, his adopted son, having passed through the Ecole Centrale with credit, returned loaded with prizes to Irkoutsk. Preceded by his fame, he was at once welcomed by the aristocracy of the place, and received on the same footing as if he belonged to them by birth and parentage. His good education and the interest of his patron procured him good employment and commanded

general consideration, while his easily-influenced nature inclined him to adopt the life usually led by Siberian magnates. In the Paris university, surrounded by studious young men anxious to make a future career by their own efforts, he was imbued with their ardour; in Irkoutsk, where everyone who can afford it, spends his substance in riotous living, he likewise acquired these habits. The government situation he held was merely a sinecure giving him social standing, whilst all the drudgery was done by his poorer friends for a liberal remuneration; for his adopted father never stinted him, and he took advantage of the liberality with which he was treated to run into the most unscrupulous extravagance.

A month had not elapsed before the first student of the Parisian school had been transformed into the foremost dandy of these Polar regions. He drank and gambled, and his flat Buriati face and slanting eyes stood not in his way in winning laurels in the boudoirs of the Siberian beauties. His very ugliness indeed seemed to be his chief attraction in that line, for nothing tempts the daughters of Eve so much as novelty. All the vices of the golden youth of Irkoutsk were magnified tenfold in

this civilized savage. When he gambled it was with frenzy, and he carried dissipation to its furthest limits. He was blustering in the society of men, and almost improper in that of ladies; conceited among his equals, he was a toady to his superiors and a brute to those beneath him. In a word, he was the type on which all the rising stars of fashion modelled themselves in that distant corner of the globe.

Mr. ——, the author of this wonderful production, was delighted, and resembled the author of a successful piece, who, hidden behind the scenes, witnesses the success of his work, and, hearing the applause, thinks, 'This is the reward of my labour, the recompense for my toil.'

'Well,' he used to say to his friends who came to congratulate him upon the career of his adopted son, 'he has acquired both knowledge and the polish of good society.'

A year passed—the young Phœnix of the steppes reached the highest pinnacle of his glory. Adored by the ladies, worshipped by the youths of the place, tolerated by the authorities, the terror of the police and night watchers, the ornament of the drawing-rooms, he travelled on a path strewn with laurels, and would most

likely in time have drunk himself to death or been killed in a quarrel with one of his intimate friends, had it not been for an apparently trifling accident which powerfully influenced his future. An old Buriati appeared in Irkoutsk bringing with him some skins to exchange for European goods. The Buriati are often seen there, but their journeys thither are mostly undertaken under escort, and the termination of these excursions is invariably the gaol. How the old man had the courage to abandon of his own accord his hut and usual habits, and conquer his natural indolence to come and sell sable, fox, and bear skins, can only be accounted for by mysterious fatality creating a thousand small causes, out of which arise later grave and unforeseen results.

It was through some such fatality that our young dandy, driving in his well-appointed sleigh, caught sight of his countryman spreading out his skins in the market-place. The exterior of the patriarch had nothing very attractive. Covered with dirt and dust, smelling of fish oil, and such like, he displayed in his countenance the type already described of mental debasement and wild bestiality. And yet that man became an object of the most

intense interest to the favourite of Irkoutsk. He fancied he saw a reflection of himself in the flat, expressionless features, or at least a kindred being. He stopped, and, jumping out of his sleigh, spoke a few words to the Buriati, who, not understanding Russian, looked at his interrogator suspiciously, and, showing two rows of long, sharp, white teeth, muttered a few words in his native dialect. The sound of his mother tongue awakened in him old time-worn associations, and the youth trembled, turned pale, and —who can comprehend human nature?—a tear, a real tear, the first he had shed for years, rolled slowly down his face, that face which up to this time had never expressed an emotion indicating an inward struggle of the soul or the secret feelings of the heart.

Angry with himself, ashamed of his weakness, he turned away, remounted his sleigh, and drove home. But from that moment an indescribable anxiety took possession of him. He was gloomy and silent during the orgies of which he was wont to be the soul; he yawned in the company of the fine ladies who flattered him. Champagne lost its flavour; cards bored him, and, what was still more extraordinary, for a whole month after his meeting with the old

Buriati he had not a single fight nor did he cane a single policeman. Instead, he seemed to be always hearing the long forgotten sound of his native tongue, seeing the broad and hairy frames of his brethren, smelling in the air the odour of skins, hearing the breath of the desert wind rustling in the branches of a Buriati hut. All this was tending to remove from the savage that thin coating which civilization had given to a nature which it was unable radically to change.

His patron was the first to remark this change. Blindly attached to his adopted son, he redoubled his efforts to make his life attractive. He purchased new horses and carriages, invented new amusements, and doubled his gifts of money. But all to no purpose. The young man, reserved and mysterious, loving no one, trusting no one, hid in the depths of his soul the mental malady which was slowly overshadowing his existence.

The doctors called it hypochondria, spleen, but it was nothing but home-sickness, a longing for the land which had cradled the first ideas and impressions of that desert child.

This state lasted some months. At last one morning the young Buriati suddenly disappear-

ed, and neither the efforts of his patron nor the researches of the police had any result. It was generally supposed that in a fit of temporary insanity he had thrown himself into the river flowing by Irkoutsk; and this idea would have remained till this day had it not been that several years after he was accidentally discovered amongst the Buriati tribes. A few words spoken by him in French led to the discovery, otherwise no one would have recognised in the dirt-begrimed, foul-smelling man the late dandy and student of a Paris gymnasium.

This meeting did not lead to his forsaking the life he had chosen. All the efforts made in that direction proved unavailing. His patron journeyed through the steppes to endeavour to awake his heart, his sentiments, but all in vain! The late Don Juan of Irkoutsk answered in his dialect that he did not know what they wanted, that he had never left his country, had never known, and did not wish to know, a different life from the one he was leading; and the surrounding Buriati, with their usual craftiness, confirmed his words, one of them even declaring that he was his father!

Nothing remained to be done. The law forbids a son to be taken away by force from his

father, and written documents, registers of birth, &c., do not exist in the desert. Thus, in spite of the moral conviction, it was impossible to bring anything home to the runaway Buriati, especially as the few words spoken by him in French, and which he most energetically denied afterwards, were the only signs of forgetfulness he was ever guilty of during his life in the steppes. All the proofs to which he was put were without result, and, to every question put to him in another tongue, he invariably replied in Buriati, 'horn' (I don't understand). Thus he was left to the life he had chosen. His friend returned to Irkoutsk with somewhat altered opinions as to the influence of civilization in remoulding the type of races and the regeneration of primitive tribes. The young Parisian laureate, lover of cards, champagne, and truffles, lives in a Buriati hut, anoints himself with grease, hunts bears, and now and then lies in wait for a convict to satisfy the instincts of his nature by the sight of the expiring agonies of his victim, instincts to which his old orgies, his boxing matches, and the caning of policemen ministered but feebly.*

* This narrative is strictly true in all its details, and was related to me by a most trustworthy witness.

Besides the pagan Buriati, whose blood-thirsty nature and wild, brutal stubbornness in resisting the efforts of civilization we have endeavoured to describe, there lives in the north, beyond the Baikal, and in the south of the government of Irkoutsk, the Buddist Buriati. Of the same origin and blood, they yet differ from their brethren who profess the Shaman pagan faith, not only in character, but in all their outward characteristics. The beneficial influence of the teaching of Prince Sidert, a hermit from Sakia, who, having become a Buddist, made known the mystery of Nirvana, founded on the old metempsychosis of Indian Brahminism, has caused their distinct position. The tenets of the Buddist religion, which aims at sparing every living creature as much pain and sorrow as possible, are distinctly opposed to everything cruel or unjust, enjoining respect for the life of even the crawling worm; and it has had the effect of softening gradually their savage nature.

The Buddist Buriati are ashamed of their Shaman brethren, looking on them as men steeped in materialism; and they pity the Christians, whose faith forces them to see in eternity everlasting suffering, whilst they, con-

sidering existence as a misfortune and death a sweet tranquillity, see in 'nirvana' (nothingness) the summit of all good and the highest pinnacle of happiness. I ought to add that this moral state of the Buddists of the southern part of Irkoutsk is true only of their 'Lamas' (priests), who have some notions of the teaching proclaimed twelve centuries ago by the son of the Indian king, Suddadam. The common people, following blindly the time-honoured road, fulfil all the observances prescribed by the Indo-Buddist faith without knowing the significance of a searching into the doctrines which underlie the outward forms. The allegorical figures they interpret by the senses materially, and, when asked for the explanation of these signs, they are unable to answer.

In every important Buddist Buriati settlement stands a pagoda. This building of wood has all the appearance of a European church or Mohammedan mosque, except that on the top of the high tower, instead of the Saviour's cross or the crescent of Islam, there rises a long, sharp-pointed needle. This symbol pourtrays the human thought and the prayers of those assembled inside shooting up to heaven. In the interior of the pagoda stands the table of

sacrifice, or altar, beside which the Lama performs the religious rites. The daily offering placed thereon consists of salt, grain, and a piece of cooked mutton, and fills three small copper dishes. This bloodless offering is like the 'Juge Sacrificium' of the ancient Israelites.* Not far from the altar, a little to the right, is seen the wheel of prayers.† This engine is like an enormous mill, such as is used in European granaries. The Buddists who wish to pray have to keep turning the handle of it. On both the side walls of the pagoda, as well as in the recess round the altar hang pictures painted on tin, or stand statues carved in wood or stone. All these represent the protecting deity, or Budda, his prophet. These symbols shock by their deformity those whose eyes are accustomed to gaze on artistic contours, and even the idealization of human shapes. This is the reason why almost all the travellers who visit the pagodas, and who do not investigate the nature of things, are loud in their condemnation of the hideousness of these statues

* Numbers, xxviii, v. 3. Exodus, xxix, v. 38.

† This machine is full of small pieces of paper, each signifying a short prayer. The rise and fall of these slips, caused by the turning of the handle, constitutes the prayer.

and pictures. The monstrous ugliness, however, of these emblems is nothing but an allegorical form, whose object it is to represent through the senses the mental attributes of the deity. For example, omnipotence is represented by a man with an almost unlimited number of hands; the power of seeing everything by a like figure, covered, like the ancient Argus, by a multitude of eyes. In the Buddist religion, humps on the forehead mean wisdom, a hump on the back the weight of sacrifices which he carried; claws on the fingers, horns on the head, and tusks projecting from the mouth signify the different transformations he went through before he was able by his endurance and his penance to annihilate his existence and steep himself for ever in the shades of Nirvana.

During the religious ceremonies, the Lamas invariably sit on the ground motionless, with their eyes fixed on the impersonation of the sage, amid the strains of a music which is soft at first and scarcely audible, but soon becoming a deafening noise. This music, composed of kettledrums, cymbals, very long trumpets, and large sea-shells, furnished with whistles, is wild and loud, and does not possess the slightest

harmony. All the instruments composing this hideous orchestra are imported by the Buriati from Pekin, and no important festival or religious observance can take place without this infernal concert. Often even on ordinary days, the rich worshippers of Budda, summon to their houses the noisy artists of the pagoda, and, turning the wheel of prayer, appear to find enjoyment in this chaos of sounds. Their fasts —of which they keep several during the year— consist of a complete abstinence from sunrise to sunset. During these fasts they also observe absolute silence; the instant, however, the sun sinks beneath the horizon, large basins filled with meat, prepared beforehand, vanish with prodigious rapidity, and the greediness of the fasting Buriati knows no limits. This, together with the abuse of strong drinks, which characterises the conclusion of every fast, creates numerous illnesses arising from over-eating and over-drinking.

The Buddist Lama should be a model of gentleness, patience, and humility; he ought to distinguish himself by abstemiousness, and be a living example of the way in which people should overcome all their evil passions and habits, tending to draw their minds away from

the peaceful contemplation of Nirvana. All the more so, as in the countries belonging to Russia where Buddism is scarcely tolerated, there are no gigantic pagodas, serving to harbour a host of beggars whose rags remind one forcibly of the miserable uncertainty of earthly things. This task should be the chief incentive in the lives of the Buddist priesthood; but, as is usually the case in this world, the Lamas, whilst conforming outwardly to the principles of their law-giver, know how to eschew these laws, and give full rein to their desires and passions. These representatives of all the cardinal virtues assume during their religious ceremonies a solemn immobility, intended to remind the faithful of the dogma of the complete annihilation of existence; and, in making themselves motionless for a few moments, they imagine they have fulfilled their mission.

The Buddist religion, with the intention of preserving the servants of the altar from the love of earthly pleasures, has forbidden marriage; but, following the letter of the law, they do not get married in the pagodas, but privately, and thus, having several unlawful wives, persuade themselves that they have in no way transgressed.

The respect for life in every animal is one of the chief tenets of their faith. Following up this idea, the Lamas always carry about with them a utensil for filtering water, which, according to them, saves from destruction myriads of small insects that are found in every liquid, and yet, whilst seeming to perform so thoroughly the precepts of the sage, they do not hesitate during the festivals to partake of roast mutton or other meat. Finally, much as they feel it incumbent upon them to assume an attitude of perfect immobility in the temple, as much do they outside it, by their liveliness, the freedom of their movements, and the gaiety of their conversation, in all respects imitate the habits and ways of common mortals. More than this, they try to go beyond the laity, and to show, more especially to foreigners, their social qualities. They are entirely different from other pagan priests, possessing a certain erudition, and are able, if not to explain completely, at least to give a very good idea of the signification of the symbols of the Book of Vedas. Having a taste for theological discussions, they never avoid them, and take a pleasure in expounding the mysteries of Nirvana.

A year ago, when a rich Buddist merchant

died in Irkoutsk, the Lama who arrived for the funeral accepted the hospitality of the Russian inhabitants, and, in frequenting assemblies arranged after the European fashion, these desert priests did not shock their hosts by much difference in their habits and customs. A few of the Siberian pagan priests speak Russian very fairly, but the Mongol tongue, which should be familiar to them for the performance of the duties of their faith, they often do not understand. The Buriati address their priests in their native dialect; all the religious ceremonies, however, are performed in the Sanscrit by the priests, who read mechanically the doctrines, written in the ancient Indian tongue, unintelligible alike to themselves and their congregation.

The usual mode of praying to the Supreme Being consists, as I have already said, in turning the prayer-wheel, inside which the slips of paper, with the letters 'Om' (a sigh to God), moved by catches placed within the box, keep rising and falling alternately. These machines may often be seen standing by the road-side, for the use and convenience of the faithful; and no votary of Budda will ever pass one of these mills without stopping. Seeing the

prayer-wheel, he dismounts, and, after having given a few turns to the handle, continues his journey, happy in the conviction that he has thus fulfilled his religious duties. Some, particularly anxious to distinguish themselves by their piety, keep such wheels, but of course much smaller, in their houses. This article, reminding one somewhat of a musical box, is placed beside its owner, who, whenever the wish prompts him, turns the handle. He does not do this with the reverence which would seem indispensable whilst performing the most solemn act of faith, but quite mechanically, thinking of something else, whilst smoking his pipe, taking his food, or even talking to his friends on the most trivial subjects.

The houses of the Buddist Buriati, built of wood in the European style, are clean and neat. In addition to the prayer-wheel and the statue of Budda, there are a great many chests in the room, and a number of household utensils, such as copper basins, plates, saucepans, tea-caddies, &c., neatly arranged on shelves. These chests, the gigantic dimensions of which attract the attention of strangers, contain nothing at all, though they are provided with good locks. This arises from the character of the Irkoutsk

Buriati, whose failing it is to make themselves appear richer than they are, and to simulate a wealth they do not possess. They like to exhibit to visitors their smallest possessions, and are delighted if they have been able to excite the envy of their neighbours thereby. Even when they have bought in Irkoutsk a piece of stuff for a gown for their wife, or a handkerchief for their daughter, it must not be put away in one of these large boxes, but laid in a conspicuous place, so that every visitor may see it, and conceive a high idea of their financial position. In reality, their stores are never very considerable. This nation, inexpert in commerce, has never been able, with the best intentions on their part, to take the prominent station which belongs to wealth and trade. Though devoid of acuteness, they are, nevertheless, open to receiving outward impressions, and are always most anxious to inquire into anything novel. The possession of an innate curiosity, a spirit of inquiry, and a desire to leave the sphere in which they live might suggest a hope that this branch of the Buriati would soon become civilized, were it not for a blind attachment to Buddism, which forms an insurmountable barrier. The only difficulty

in the way of bringing the Shaman savages morally closer to the European population lies in the immense expanse of the steppes, in the midst of which their settlements are scattered. Could this geographical difficulty be obviated, all the Shaman tribes, joining by degrees the Christian church, would in time assimilate with the in-coming population. But with the Buddists the matter assumes another aspect. There the foundations are purely mental, the ideal of undisturbed peace, so dear to their sluggish nature, and especially the predominance of their priests, who, in spite of their failings, occupy a much higher standing than the Shamans, a rock against which all efforts will be broken.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SAYANS, MONGOLS, AND YAKUTS.

HAVING described the Baikal and the Irkoutsk Buriati, let us now turn to the west, and, following the Chinese frontier, arrive at the southern boundary of the Yenisei government. Here dwell the Sayans and the Mongols, the dwarfed descendants of a once mighty and warlike nation.

Several centuries ago, when the Kirghiz and Tartars were spreading terror through the neighbouring Asiatic countries, Mongolia alone not only opposed their encroachments, but even in her might equalled the Chinese empire, which was as strong as herself in warlike matters, and far superior to her in civilization. In the course of time it happened, as it generally does when the science and political enlightenment of a

nation are put in the scale against its savage neighbours, whose only reliance is in their swords, Mongolia was conquered by the Mantchurs, and became a Chinese province. The scope of this work does not permit us to enter into details concerning the history of these countries, and, if I mention the above facts, it is because during the annexation of Mongolia to the Chinese empire a small part of the migratory races inhabiting the almost inaccessible regions of the colossal Sayan mountains escaped the notice of the mandarins who were reorganizing the newly-conquered province, and, after living for a long time independent, they were joined to Russia in the last century. This section of the Mongol race is but small, and from the fact of the frontier not being perfectly surveyed, as well as from the fact of their constantly moving from place to place, none of the families composing it know with certainty to which of the two nations they belong.

The Sayans and the Mongols, though possessing all the outward characteristics of their nation, in addition to the signs impressed upon them by their connection with the Mantchurs, are very different from their ancestors. The specially warlike character of that nation has

been weakened under the influence of centuries of stagnation and isolation. Their encroaching tendencies have vanished. Not a trace remains of their former endurance and energy, and, what is stranger still, personal courage—that distinctive attribute of man living in a state of nature—has ceased to be their portion.

All the Siberian tribes, in spite of their many vices and failings, rival each other in their indomitable bravery and a courage which scorns danger; whereas, the Sayans, descendants of one of the most courageous nations, are now timid, and ever ready to seek safety in an ignominious flight. Their Asiatic cunning makes them dangerous enemies in commercial transactions, but, let their courage be put to the test, they instantly become humble and ready to acquiesce in everything. No one will ever gain anything from them by kindness or gentleness, but the sight of a revolver or a well-sharpened knife, or even a commanding tone of voice has a wonderful effect upon them.

A few years ago, while travelling along the Chinese frontier, and often visiting the Sayans' encampments, I was able to become acquainted with their character. In spite of their entire indifference to the rites of hospitality, of their

vague ideas about other people's property, and even of their criminal tendencies, their cowardice is so great that the well-armed European travellers who will keep watch in turn, can easily traverse these countries without risking their lives.

The land they inhabit is incomparably beautiful, but that beauty has nowhere the bewitching charm of the Amoor province; neither the snowy peaks of the Alps nor the bold summits of the Pyrenees can give the slightest idea of these masses of granite, of the fantastic contours of these huge walls of rock, of this wild region which seems to have neither beginning nor end. So fearful, so terrible is it in its vastness, that one's ideas seem oppressed and the imagination overwhelmed. It is a chaos of towering rocks, primeval forests, foaming torrents, and unfathomable abysses, in whose presence man, the lord of creation, seems to be dwarfed.

The Sayan habitations, covered with white bark or the skins of animals, may be seen, now at the foot of a precipice, anon, like the nest of a wild bird, perched against the rocky wall, a white speck scarcely visible amidst the colossal mountain forms. The

inhabitants are so much accustomed to this wild grandeur that when first they come into the plains they cannot understand it. Astonished and frightened, they seem to be seeking the granite walls which separate their birthplace from the rest of the world. Their life, occupied entirely in hunting, fishing, and feeding sheep, would be peaceful and secluded were it not for their passion for barter, or rather their irrepressible desire to cheat anyone they may come across. They do not understand simple exchange of goods with merely a fair profit, and never feel quite happy unless they have been able to take-in the stranger by their frequently-transparent trickery. When craft and cunning are of no avail, they have recourse to theft, and when successful they delight in congratulating themselves on their adroitness in appropriating the property of others.

The dress of the Sayans and the Mongolians living on the frontier very much resembles the dress of the Chinese of the lower class. It consists of a long, circular cloak with a low waist, turned-up shoes with thick soles, and a leather hat adorned with turned-up flaps. All the men shave their heads, and only a

very few leave a long plait of hair, growing from the top of the head and flowing down the back. These latter are Buddists—with this exception, all belong to the Shaman faith.

The Buddist Lama living in the fortified town of Uliassoutai in Mongolia never comes into these parts, thinking no doubt that he need not give himself so much trouble for the sake of the few worshippers of Budda; it is the latter who, once a year, make a journey to the pagoda at Uliassoutai to perform the duties prescribed by their religion. In their houses may be found small, clumsily carved statuettes of a sage descended from the Sakei, to which they present offerings and burn incense several times in the month.

The religious ceremonies of the Sayans differ only slightly from those of the Tunguz; the principal distinction consists in having a Gonia, an old woman who often assists the priest when attending the sick, and a Zig (a clown on the religious staff), whose duty it is to amuse the public during the festivals of the white god, or at a marriage feast.

The Gonia is a very old woman, thin, yellow, generally deformed, and reminding one strongly of the witches in 'Macbeth.' She knows less

about the properties of plants than the priests, but enjoys a large income from the terror she creates by ascribing to herself the power of casting charms.

Zig always appears in a dress covered with bells, his face smeared with coal, and talking nonsense. It is difficult to understand the existence of this individual, as, although belonging to the religious staff, he is yet held in universal contempt. With this clerical mountebank no one entertains relations of friendship or social intercourse, no one addresses him or takes his hand, knowing that the slightest approach to friendship with him is looked upon as ignominious and as a serious breach of self-respect.

Such are the habits and customs of the Sayans inhabiting the border lands, who, although no longer under the rule of China, cannot be said to belong thoroughly to Siberia. This small tribe, complete in itself, is, nevertheless, connected with all the other offshoots of the Mongolians until it reaches the Ourga, where it gradually merges into the Mantchur race.

Beginning with the Urzankhai, whose settlements extend beyond the Dzungariac, and around Uliassoutai to the Uran huts belonging

to the Ourga principality, there are many different races in the interior of Mongolia resembling each other, and only differing gradually as they diverge more and more. The Sayan tribe, standing in advance like a vedette, first shows the sharp outlines of the type, which further on gradually disappears in the broad expanse of the Chinese Empire. The destiny of two distinct nations joined by conquest is always influenced by their separate nationalities. China, by the force of her civilization, obliterates the Mongolian nationality, whilst Mongolia by the force of her past glory influences the government of the whole country, having at the summit of power one of her descendants.* A long time must yet elapse before this question is finally settled, and in the meantime the influence of the higher civilization of the Mantchurs upon the wild Mongolian customs is so great, the moral force so strong and incessant, that the races tend to merge into each other, and even now it is with difficulty one can trace an ethnographical frontier between China proper and its annexed province.

* The present Emperor of China, Ki-tsiang, is of Mongolian origin.

In describing the Sayans—who though they are not numerous, and possess no standing in the history of Eastern nations, are, notwithstanding, very important, being a connecting link in the chain of the different nationalities living under one crown—I have somewhat diverged from my task. I will therefore return to my programme, and describe the series of tribes inhabiting the Siberian territory.

We will now take a glance at the centre of Siberia, inhabited by the Yakuts, differing among themselves in character and even in appearance. The province of Yakutek, their birthplace, also belongs to a land scarcely known to Europeans. The rare traveller who visits Siberia on a scientific expedition generally penetrates as far as Irkoutsk, and dare not venture further. In a manner it may be said to form the junction of European civilization with Asiatic barbarity. The post-road, however, which crosses the northern part of the province of Irkoutsk, extends as far as the miserable little town of Kirensk. Beyond this, one can still get over a few score of versts on wheels, and then all that tends to remind one of Europe ceases suddenly. The chief impediment to the mode of travelling

one is usually accustomed to, is formed by an arm of the great river Lena, which cuts off all further communication, and seems to say, 'Thus far, and no further.' But this first impression, produced by the steep and rocky banks of one of the finest rivers in Siberia, vanishes in the presence of necessity. At this point, when all visible tracks end, commence quite different means of communication, uniting the lands already traversed with the Yakuts country.

In summer those whose commercial or professional duties compel them to continue their journey, embark on large rafts or boats, and navigate the Lena in an easterly direction; in winter the course of the same river, but this time thickly coated with ice, becomes the line along which glide small sledges drawn by dogs, carrying the traveller over seemingly endless distances. Both the summer and winter journeys are often most tiring, and almost impossible for a man unaccustomed to such fatigue. In summer, during the dog-days, the sun's burning rays, the swarms of venomous insects, thirst, and loss of strength render one helpless. In winter, polar cold, snowdrifts, and storms sweeping across the steppes give no

breathing time or a moment's peace. In both seasons the entire absence of the commonest necessaries of life becomes a torture which can only be undergone by those whose lot has been cast amid the wild steppes. On the banks of the Lena are seen here and there the yourts, or huts, of the Yakuts, forming, as it were, an artery whose weak pulsation marks the existence of man. This line, traced by the course of the river, is the only inhabited part. Beyond it there is nothing but an endless expanse stretching on till it disappears beneath the waters of the Arctic Ocean. The Yakuts living close to the banks of the gigantic Lena make frequent excursions into the interior of these mysterious regions, but they never venture very far, fully aware that, the moment the provisions they have brought with them are exhausted, starvation stares them in the face.

Living for centuries in this desert, and holding no communication whatever with the outside world, except when they come to sell fish and game to the travellers on the Lena, the Yakuts have preserved unimpaired their primitive character. No foreign element has influenced their habits, mode of living, or cus-

toms. No trace of civilization appears among them. Quiet, gentle, upright, and extremely patient, they are never the slaves of their passions, never give way to violent feelings of revenge or hate. Cunningness, falseness, and hypocrisy are unknown amongst them. Their word can always be relied upon; their promise is always fulfilled; an assurance once given is faithfully kept. The uprightness of these people is so great that in the annals of their quiet life there has never been an instance of cheating or stratagem, still less of crime. These noble qualities are the gift of Nature; but their incomparable patience is chiefly the result of climate and atmospheric influence.

This opinion is arrived at from general ethnographical considerations. All nations inhabiting the high northern latitudes are distinguished by this same virtue. The characters of Laplanders, Icelanders, and the inhabitants of the rocky confines of Norway bear the marks of this passive, lamb-like patience. The power which tends to level all inward demonstrations is the polar temperature, which congeals every violent motion of the blood, every strong feeling. Under this freezing influence, the rest-

lessness inborn in man is calmed, the passions sober down, and the man whose fate made him a child of these northern latitudes becomes an automaton, impervious alike to cold and to an affront, and bearing with the same equanimity a box on the ear or a snowstorm. Patience which we consider a virtue, because it has its roots in moral power, overcoming the agitation of the blood, becomes in these children of the North a defect in character. It is impossible not to pity these unfortunates, bearing with angelic patience the abuse and ill-treatment—generally brutal and invariably undeserved—vented upon them by the small merchants or petty clerks travelling on the Lena. Yet they do not deserve contempt; they do not act thus from any want of self-respect, but rather from an apathy bordering on moral incapacity. They receive alike good or bad with equal faith in the justice of whatever befalls them.

It often happens that the monotony of the journey on a raft, the want of occupation, and especially the knowledge of perfect impunity makes low and degraded shopkeepers' assistants, devoid of all feelings of humanity, do things which are beyond practical jokes, and

which closely resemble cruelty, but even then the unequalled patience of the Yakuts never forsakes them. The following anecdote has been related to me :—

Last year a few men were sent by their masters from Irkoutsk to transact some commercial business in Yakutck. After having finished their land journey, they, as is customary, went on board a raft, and with their guides and wares sailed on the river Lena. This journey appeared monotonous and tiresome to men accustomed to the amusements and dissipations of a large town, so, after having half-emptied the brandy barrel, played cards till they were tired, and given and received a good many bruises in friendly quarrels, they found themselves at the end of their resources, and did not know how to kill the time that still remained to be spent on board. Luckily the Yakuts' yourts found on the banks afforded a pastime much in vogue then. Landing every few hours under the pretext of buying fish or meat, they took the opportunity to annoy in every way the peaceful aborigines sitting quietly outside their huts; but all their nice jokes, sometimes physically painful, produced no effect on the patient and gentle Yakuts, accustomed

to such behaviour. The Yakuts only smiled sweetly, and wished them good-bye kindly and in a friendly manner, as if the Russians had been loading them with favours instead of insulting them incessantly.

This painful conduct, the absence of all opposition, and apparent insensibility, failed to satisfy the half-drunk and quarrelsome shopmen. They got tired of persecuting people who seemed so callous, and, angry at meeting no opposition, they left the inhabitants of the desert in peace. Days and weeks dragged on their slow course, the second month since they embarked had commenced, and the journey down the Lena seemed as far from completion as ever. Their heads ached from constant drinking, 'shtos and stukulka' (a favourite game of cards) failed to amuse them any longer, even the friendly fights seemed to have palled.

What was to be done? How kill the remaining time?

'Shall we try the Yakuts once more?' said one.

'No use; they are made of stone, nothing will touch them.'

'Shall we try to anger them?'

'Impossible, they don't know how to be angry.'

'That is because you have not tried them properly. If I only wished——'

'What! could you regale us with the sight of an infuriated Yakut? that would be a wonderful sight. Unfortunately no one has as yet been able to do it.'

'Except me.'

'Will you bet?' cried the others.

'Certainly, anything you like to bet.' And so it was.

The hero who undertook this chivalrous enterprise was a strong, broad-shouldered man, with a red nose, a voice hoarse from continual drinking, and was celebrated in Irkoutsk for his frequent quarrels. The first Yakut that they came to was chosen as the subject on which this innocent game was to be played. Soon after this conversation, some white yourts of the aborigines appeared in the distance. At the sight of them the sleepy, drunken faces of the shopmen brightened up, the prospect of a new amusement seemed to rouse them from the somnolent state to which hard drinking and the monotony of the journey had reduced them, and they looked forward impatiently to the

85713

moment of landing, At last the raft touched the bank, and they jumped ashore. In a small valley surrounded by rocks rose a few yourts, forming a semi-circle. Before each of these improvised houses, the Yakut families were quietly lying in the sun; some of them, perceiving the new-comers, rose and humbly offered their services. The war-like shopman scanned them all round, seeking the fittest physiognomy for his intended victim. Not liking half-measures, he wished to win his bet gloriously, and selected for his experiment the one who seemed to him most worthy by his position of such notice.

This was a man of middle age, with long, black hair and black eyes, and an appearance of calmness and dignity about his whole person —one to whom the other aborigines seemed to pay great respect.

'You woolley one, come here.'*

The man thus apostrophised rose immediately, and, leaving the nets he was mending, bowed low and approached.

'My good fellow, why have you such a short nose? let me pull it and perhaps it will grow,'

* All the shopmen sent on these journeys can speak the Yakutsh dialects.

and so saying with his powerful hand he pulled the Yakut's nose.

The poor man only smiled, trying to appear as if he shared in the innocent merriment, and not a muscle of his face displayed inward displeasure. Seeing that this was a failure, the shopman successively tried more and more painful jokes, He threw in the man's face a bucketful of cold water, poured some pitch on his head, and filled his mouth with tobacco, and in fact tried all the witticisms approved in such cases, giving a bright example of the mental culture of the class to which he belonged. The subject of this entertainment only smiled good-naturedly, and his surrounding fellow-countrymen enjoyed the game immensely. Enraged by the fear of losing his bet, the shopman exchanged his jokes for operations of a most painful description; the smile vanished from the Yakut's face, a look of suffering appeared in its place. He opened his lips as if to speak, but he evidently did not know how to put his thoughts into words.

'Stop,' said one of the Russians, 'he is going to speak; you have at last made him impatient, and he will now begin to swear at you; you have won your bet.'

Struck by the justice of this observation, the operator let go his victim, and eyeing him severely, asked in a gruff voice,

'Perhaps my jokes displeased you.'

The unfortunate man looked at him quietly, and said,

'No, they pleased me very much, but——'

'What, what?' cried the other, hoping now to win his bet.

'I have one prayer to make to you, please allow me to scream out if you are to go on playing with me.'

These words fell like a thunderbolt on the shopman fully anticipating a victory.

'I have lost my bet,' he cried, angrily; 'let's go away, there is nothing to be done here.'

And the merry party went on board the raft once more, the shopman complaining loudly of the stupidity of the aborigines, through which he was obliged to pay his friends a round sum of money.

This picture shows a phase of human character so different from our European ideas that, to one who does not know the inhabitants of these distant lands, it must appear unnatural and exaggerated. There is no one general level of character in these countries, such as civilization

produces among other nations. Here each race, being subject to a different climate and different influences, forms itself and acquires special characteristics, which, being developed to their utmost limits, surprise us by the sharpness of their outlines.

For instance, can there be any more striking difference than exists between the fierceness of the Buriati and the patience and gentleness of the Yakuts, the fiendish cunning of the Gilliacks and the kind-heartedness and friendliness of the Tunguz and Tartars. Such extremes are to be met with, not only in Siberia, but in other places wherever social development has not effaced individualities. The history of the discovery of America, and of the subsequent voyages to the New World, furnish us with numerous examples. Columbus, Cook, and others found totally different phases of character in the different places in which they landed. Now they came upon the cannibal Caribs, anon upon the gentle and friendly Iroquois; the Mandans inhabiting the banks of the Missouri welcomed the white arrivals as supernatural beings, and the blood-thirsty Shawans butchered the unwary sailors by a blow from their tomahawks. In a word, wherever the Europeans

landed they found the wild races of America differing from each other in their aims, character, and disposition, and yet all these branches belonged to one great race of red-skinned Indians; whilst the nations of northern Asia, though now in a measure connected, have sprung originally from perfectly dissimilar races. The Urâl-Altai, Kalkas, Old Kamtsckatka, Mongolian, and Mantchur tribes constituted centuries ago separate nations, and if at present the thread of social relations and the civilizing efforts of the government connect these different elements, yet, considering their primitive derivation, we can hardly be surprised to see in their descendants such multiform habits and characters.

The Yakuts are of small stature, thick-set, and awkward in their movements. Naturally of a social disposition, they agree wonderfully amongst themselves. Their occupations, like those of all the Asiatic tribes, are fishing and hunting, fishing generally merely to satisfy their wants, and hunting for the same reason, or to protect themselves from wild animals. They do not experience so much pleasure in these occupations as the other races. They fish and hunt from necessity, not from love of sport. Their greatest pleasure, especially during the long winter

nights, consists in large gatherings in their yourts to listen to long stories related by those among them who are distinguished by their talent in that line.

If a traveller, acquainted with the Yakut language or having a good interpreter, finds himself within a yourt at such a time, and flatters himself he has at last come upon a mine of traditions or popular legends, he is soon undeceived, the narratives of the Yakuts being neither history nor legend, nor even imaginative, but merely a conglomeration of the same oft-repeated phrases, illogically put together, and having neither aim nor sequence, neither beginning nor end. The usual theme of these stories is a conversation between a man and various animals, an entirely meaningless conversation in which it is impossible to discover a guiding idea. For instance :—

A man goes, goes, goes (this signifies a long journey, and is repeated several scores of times) and meets a wolf.

'Wolf, where art thou going?'

'In search of food for I am hungry, and my she-wolf is hungry, and my young ones are hungry.'

On hearing this reply, the man again goes,

goes, goes (here follows an almost endless repetition of the verb to go) and meets an eagle flying.

'Eagle, where art thou flying?'

'To seek food for I am hungry, and my mate is hungry, and my young ones are hungry.'

And in this way the man meets all the known animals inhabiting these regions, to each of them he puts the same question, and from each receives the same answer. There is a great variety of animals in the forests, and the narrator feels bound not to omit a single one, from the reindeer down to the scarcely perceptible midge. For this reason the talk lasts for several hours, and yet the audience never appear tired of hearing the incessant repetition of the same phrases, and seem to hang on the words proceeding from the lips of the narrator.

A stranger listening to one of these stories is constantly expecting that the end of a Yakut's tale will show some meaning or carry some slight suspicion of a moral lesson, in fact, have *some* meaning; he rejoices in the hope that the man who is always going, and receives from all the animals he meets the same answer, will at last bethink himself that he too ought to imitate the four-footed or winged informants and seek

to support his wife. But no! the end of the story is as meaningless as the beginning, or, to speak more accurately, it has no end. The man who has been going so long at last stops, and—there is the end.

One of the Irkoutsk merchants who related this to me, finding himself once in a yourt while some such narrative was going on, and seeing that the story-teller abruptly cut the thread of his discourse, asked,

'Well, the man went, and went, and stopped, and what then?'

'Then,' shyly answered the confused bard, 'then nothing, he stands, and that is all.'

The Yakuts have about a score of similar themes to fill up the winter nights, but they are all of the same pattern, and the only difference is in another set of phrases being used.

The sociability of the Yakuts, springing from their kind-hearted and gentle characters, would render them easily amenable to the benefits of civilization were it not for their extraordinary shyness and almost servile humility; considering men of other races, and especially Europeans, as beings superior in every respect to themselves, they dare not compare themselves with them even in thought, and imagine that the

very idea of trying to imitate them is unpardonable impudence. If they listen respectfully to the insulting jokes of a wandering pedlar, or submit meekly to painful usage from drunken shopmen, it is not from cowardice or fear, but from the firm conviction of their own inferiority. Endowed by nature with indomitable courage, they are fearless in the presence of danger. It is a fine sight to see these short, thick-set men when the fierce and ravenous wolves attack their settlements; armed with spear or axe they valiantly defend their wives, children, and possessions; the expression of their countenance, usually so gentle, changes marvellously; their gentle eyes gleam with ardour; the features, generally characterized by a friendly smile, assume a look of cool energy and steadfastness. These unfortunate people, accustomed to all sorts of humiliations, who are made the sport of any low European drunkard, then suddenly rise to the level of heroes.

If the Yakuts who inhabit this part of their immense country,* accustomed as they are to the sight of Europeans from time to time on the

* The Yakutsh province is 74,153 German square miles, it is therefore nearly eight times as large as France.

banks of the Lena, are yet so shy with strangers, what are we to say as regards those of them who inhabit the eastern parts beyond the town of Yakutck towards Kamtschatka? There the appearance of a stranger is an epoch in the annals of the country. The traveller, whom chance brings into these parts so distant from all European settlements, is looked upon almost as a supernatural being to whose merest whim everything must give way. I have known several persons whose fate it was to travel through these eastern parts of Siberia, and they all agreed in giving the Yakuts the highest praise for their behaviour. The best fish, the most comfortable huts, and the choicest venison were always reserved for the guests, but in spite of this disinterested hospitality, this good-nature, ready to gratify the slightest wish, the travellers still considered themselves less happy than when amongst races who had less adoration for Europeans; for, though having everything that goodwill and boundless generosity could supply, they lacked what the heart and soul require, the social bond uniting man with man.

The kindness shown to them was always so mingled with veneration and worship that it failed to satisfy men accustomed to see in other

men a fellow-creature and a brother, and not to be themselves elevated on a pedestal. They were approached with timidity, all their wishes were obeyed with alacrity, and the new-comer, finding himself a distinct item in a serving, bowing multitude, felt like the phœnix in the old story, unhappy because he could not find another being like himself.

There is an exception to this rule in the aborigines inhabiting the capital of their country. These have built themselves houses in the European style, and adopted European habits and customs, retaining only their language; having got rid of all their former ways, they seem to cling all the more strongly to this dialect, so much so, that to this day it is almost impossible to be understood in Yakutck unless speaking the language of the country.

The town of Yakutck, situated in the midst of a desert and at a point which can only be reached after a long and tedious journey, sometimes lasting for months, is a settlement separated from the rest of the world by thousands of versts of a country possessing no villages, no roads or other land communications, and thus possesses some interest. There, on the very confines of the inhabited world, lives a hand-

ful of European merchants and government clerks.

The life here has a character of its own, it is quiet and peaceful, unaffected by outward influences. The arrival of the post, which happens only a few times in the year, is a great event, and the arrival of a raft laden with necessaries of life produces a lowering of one tenth in the price of commodities.* In fact, the annals of the place could furnish ample material for a long description, were it not that this would lead us away from our chief subject, viz., an ethnographic study of the primitive tribes.

* There are times, especially during the break up of the ice on the Lena, when the scarcity of some articles causes their prices to rise to almost fabulous sums. Last autumn a 'pood' of flour fetched 8 Rs.(one sovereign), a pound of rice 10 Rs. (about twenty-five shillings), and two packs of cards 30 Rs. ; on the other hand, on account of a glut of furs in the market and no means of getting rid of them, the finest sable cost 3 Rs. (about nine shillings), a bear skin 60 copecks (two shillings), and a fox skin 20 copecks (eightpence).

CHAPTER V.

THE CHUKCHAS AND KAMTSCHATKANS.

AS I have taken my readers thus far into parts of the globe almost unknown, I hope I may be permitted to proceed into regions scarcely guessed at by science.

So far in our peregrinations, as well as meeting wilder and wilder tribes, we have also found the communications more and more difficult. Beyond the last town, Jigansk, in the Yakutck province, all traces of roads vanished, and only by means of rafts and sleighs were we able to proceed along the course of the Lena to the north-eastern lands.

The Yakut yourts scattered along the banks of the gigantic river appeared as a narrow strip of human life in the vast desert. On arriving at the culminating points we still perceive a trace

of civilization in the small glimmer of life presented by Yakutck, which, far removed from the world, like a plant far distant from the sun, dimly shows its shadowy outline. Further beyond Yakutck there are still more of the same race to be found, but having so few relations with mankind that they appear to doubt their own right to aspire to the dignity of a creature fashioned in the image of God. At last even these traces are met with no more, the yourts become more and more rare, an expanse of forests, valleys, mountains, and steppes begins, unexplored and unknown, whose vastness alone inspires man with awe and wakes in him a mysterious dread. It would seem that having reached the furthest point inhabited by man we should have to retrace our steps, as these recesses have never been traversed by human beings, and no one has fathomed the mysteries hidden therein; yet still beyond this a faint glimmer of humanity exists, a tiny spark, hardly guessed at, almost indescribable, and yet giving signs of life. Behring was the first who, in his voyages towards the pole, discovered men living in the neighbourhood of the straits which bear his name, and the sailors who have followed in his track have confirmed his statement as to

the existence of men in places so adverse to human life.

This tribe called Chukcha, separated from the rest of the world by endless tracts of uninhabited land, has no connection whatever with other men, knows no authority, and obeys no power. The isolation of the Chukchas arises from the inaccessibility of their dwelling-place; for, though that part of the globe they inhabit belongs geographically to Russia, the government, on account of the complete absence of communication by land, is unable to enforce any laws, and the visits of vessels to the Arctic Ocean are too rare, and present too many dangers and difficulties, to be of use in establishing a durable connection between them and the remainder of Siberia. It may be added that a land situated so near the pole is inconvenient for the collection of taxes. The fauna of Siberia, which are the chief source of income to the primitive tribes, and from which they yearly pay to the government a certain amount in choice furs, hardly exists so far north. Vegetation there is none; eternal snows and icebergs which never melt take the place of our ever-producing soil. How these people live, by what means they have been able to preserve

their miserable existence for centuries, is known only to Him whose protection is extended not only to the favourites of fortune, but also to the wretched beings hidden beyond the limits of the habitable world.

The habits, customs, and mode of life of the Chukchas are very little known, and, from what one can gather from the few mariners who have passed the Behring's Straits, they appear to belong to the wildest descendants of Finlanders. The white bear, the only four-footed animal which frequents these regions, provides them with fur; the seal, appearing through the ice, yields them food, and ice and snow are the only materials wherewith to shelter them from the storm and cold. Hunger, cold, a terrible climate, and an endless struggle for existence are the causes of the dwarfed shoot of an ancient race slowly disappearing from the face of the earth.

When this tribe was first discovered, it numbered several thousands, whereas barely a few hundreds now-a-days drag on their miserable existence. Even these will probably soon have perished, and, in place of a handful of humanity inhabiting this polar region, only an ethnographical record will remain.

The Arctic explorers who have had an opportunity of seeing these specimens of humanity affirm that, except in form, they hardly resemble man. Their speech is more like the roar of wild animals than the sound of human words conveying the thoughts and sentiments of heart and soul. On meeting European sailors, they used to jump and caper about like wild animals, and hide in the snow and ice; when dragged out of their hiding-places they trembled with fright, imagining that they were about to be killed. Once when a gun was fired on board a man-of-war, their fear reached such a height that the sailors, on landing, found a score of them extended on the ground. On being examined by the doctor, they were pronounced to have fainted from terror on hearing a louder sound than had ever before struck their ears.

The Kamtschatkans settled in the peninsula of that name are not much more favoured than the Arctic nations. Kamtschatka is situated much lower down than the lands skirting the Arctic Ocean, but its exposed geographical position causes its climate to be the same as in the Yakut province. In addition to the frosts, which are almost as severe and last nearly as long as the regions nearer the pole,

their greatest plague is the snow. In no other portion of the globe does the snow fall in such immense quantities as in Kamtschatka; the winds blowing on three sides from the sea bring immense clouds, which unite over the land and form a thick, black curtain on the horizon. The white covering over this desolate region increases in a brief space of time to an unheard-of depth, and renders the construction of houses impossible.

The Kamtschatkans are obliged to be always moving, and migrate from place to place with their families on sleighs drawn by dogs. These sleighs are very long and narrow, and resemble a boat on skates; the dogs are harnessed in pairs, with a single one in front. The number varies from two to five pairs. They are guided by a long stick, which the driver holds in his hand, and with which he lightly touches the leading dog on his right or left side, according to the direction he wishes to take. This mode of travelling is very rapid, and from one hundred and fifty to two hundred versts can be accomplished in this manner in twenty-four hours. The dogs run fast and steadily, driven by hunger, which is only satisfied at the stopping-place for the night. Nothing will induce them to

stop when once in motion, and if by accident the driver should fall out of the sleigh, they, in the hope of getting over their journey all the faster, and thus the sooner arriving at their food, run on, and leave him on the road. These animals are savage, disobedient, and by no means distinguished by faithfulness towards their masters; always in want of food, which, with a view to make them go the faster, is only sparingly administered, they are constantly ravenous, and there have been instances in which they were known to have devoured their feeders.

When the Kamtschatkans want to rest, they make a hole in the snow, and keep watch in turns till their dogs are sufficiently rested to be able to continue their journey. If the traveller has no family or friend to watch with him, then in spite of the greatest fatigue he never goes to sleep, but walks about to keep himself awake, otherwise the large flakes of the almost continuous snow would cover him so deeply during his sleep that it would be impossible to rise from it again. Such incidents often occur. A man completely tired out, in spite of himself, gives way to sleep, and in an incredibly short time he and his whole possessions disappear

under a layer of snow many feet in depth. The dogs, however, never succumb to this fate. Warned by their instinct, they can sleep standing, mechanically scraping away the snow with their paws.

The Kamtschatkans live solely on dried fish and drink melted snow. They have not the remotest idea of social life, or the requirements it engenders. There is not much to say about their character either; they are wild and timid, but they know how to respect authority, and pay their taxes in skins pretty regularly.

The link which binds them to the rest of the empire, though weak, has this effect: that, although of a very low mental standard, they are incomparably higher than the Chukcha. Their tongue has the sound of a human language, and, though they are naturally timid, the sight of a stranger does not throw them into abject terror, as is the case with the tribe inhabiting the shores of the Arctic Ocean. They are tall in stature, muscular, and well-developed, and although, from their resemblance to the lower animals in many of their habits, Darwin would have a wide field for his theories, more zoological than religious, still one can find in the Kamtschatkans, though a race mentally

dwarfed or undeveloped, the spark glimmering within which God has created in His image, and which, in spite of the materialism by which it is frequently hidden, will ever remain the sign of an immortal soul.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OSTIAKS.

WHILST on the subject of the Arctic nations, let us turn to the north-west, and visit the highest parts of the Yenisei and Tobolsk provinces. The climatic and atmospheric conditions are the same here, but, owing probably to fewer floating icebergs, the climate is somewhat milder than in Kamtschatka and the Americo-Russian territories.*

A regular though rare communication with the south causes the ray of civilisation, though chilled by the Siberian frosts, still to reach these

* It is worthy of notice that the climate of northern lands situated in the same altitude is much more rigorous the further east one advances. This difference is accounted for by the greater number of icebergs accumulated in these parts of the Arctic Ocean.

remote steppes, and to shed its beneficent light on the primitive peoples inhabiting these remote parts. In summer there is even communication on the Yenisei by a small steamer which penetrates as far as Turukhansk,* carrying flour, tea, sugar, drapery, ironmongery, &c., and returning with fish. Berezov is provided with a similar means of communication, though instead of a steamer boats and rafts perform the service between that place and Tiumen and Tobolsk. In this way the primitive tribe of Ostiaks, having constant relations with Europeans, are neither so savage nor so little developed as, for instance, the Chukcha.

Mrs. Felinska, in her travels through the Arctic regions,† has so vividly and graphically painted the Ostiaks that little or nothing remains for me to add about them. Berezov and its environs, so well described by that celebrated authoress, are not the sole fatherland of the Ostiaks, they inhabit the northern part of the Yenisei province as well. The Ostiaks, in common with most of the northern tribes, live

* Turukhansk is situated in latitude 65 deg. 55 min., longitude 105 deg. 15 min.

† 'Travels in Siberia,' by Mrs. Felinska. A well-known book in Poland.—TRANSLATOR.

principally in holes or houses of snow in winter, and in huts hastily constructed of branches in summer. Their principal food is fish, which they like best when half-rotten, so much so that the holes in the ground which serve as stores for this delicacy are a veritable plague during the few weeks of summer for those who navigate the Yenisei. The disgusting smell of the decomposed fish fills the air to such an extent that often at a distance of several versts, especially on the leeward side, it is impossible for the traveller who is not accustomed to it to avoid feeling sick, or at least most uncomfortable.

Every species of fish which inhabits the Yenisei and the Arctic Ocean is caught by them in large quantities, out of which they only choose the best, throwing back into the water the smaller ones or inferior kinds. So enormous is the quantity they catch that it would be sufficient to supply one of the larger European countries, and to give occupation to thousands who now seek their fortunes by emigrating to America. Unfortunately the very plentifulness of this article of food is the cause of its being wastefully squandered. Only a very small portion of the fish yearly caught

is made use of, the remainder rots in holes, and serves as food for the large numbers of ravens and crows which visit these parts in summer.

The European fishermen, who sail for this purpose beyond the Turukhansk in the early part of May, are much more careful. The chief support of their trade is the omal (a kind of herring), salted on the spot and packed in barrels. They are sent all over Siberia, and even to European Russia, where they are much valued on account of their cheapness and excellent flavour.

Those parts of the Yenisei province which are inhabited by the Ostiaks are deserts covered by a coating of snow several yards deep, which lies for ten long months, and only disappears for a few weeks beneath the rays of the summer sun.

Summer, the season of awakening life in Nature becomes in these northern regions only one more torture, making one all the more susceptible to the severe frosts which follow so soon. The scorching rays of the sun are unable to draw from the benumbed crust of the earth sufficient nourishment for man and beast.* The

* The earth in these parts is frozen to such a depth that even during the summer heats a thin surface no deeper

further one proceeds from the Yenisei, the less vegetation one perceives.

Round Turukhansk one can still find dwarfed pine-trees, more bushes than trees, which seem to remind us that this earth of ours is a mother and not a step-mother, that her womb contains the germs of plants which help to sustain our life. Here and there a small wild-flower shyly lifts its tiny head from between the raw grass which seems to grow in a lazy fashion, as if unaccustomed to such bare ground. Beyond Turukhansk, even these faint signs of life-giving Nature gradually vanish, and are replaced by tufts of moss and Arctic lichens, serving as food for the numerous herds of reindeer, who, without this last gift of Nature, would be unable to render the valuable services they do to the polar inhabitants.

Man's habitations are extremely rare in these polar regions, and one has generally to pass over several hundreds of versts of snow-clad desert before meeting a sign of human life. The layer of snow which covers these tracts of

than a few inches thaws, and beneath this thin, damp layer is found a soil perpetually frozen, in which seeds cannot develope nor trees spread their roots.

frozen land reaches in some places to the thickness of a good many fathoms, so that a person unacquainted with Arctic travelling could very easily pass a human settlement without being aware that he was driving over the top of it. Turukhansk, for instance, is composed of a few hundreds of wooden houses, in which live a small number of Europeans. In winter this, the last point which possesses administrative powers, disappears under heavy falls of snow as completely as Herculaneum and Pompeii disappeared of old under the burning ashes, with this difference: that, though having disappeared, it in time returns again to the surface of the earth, and during its entombment it continues to live happily, waiting for the summer thaws. The smoke issuing from the chimneys and warmth diffused inside the houses, as well as the wooden spades of the inhabitants, suffice to keep the houses from being entirely snowed up; they are only surrounded by high, snowy ramparts, between which narrow paths are always left for the servants to circulate.

In spite of the numerous inconveniences arising from such a state of things, the inhabitants are far from complaining, as they well know that a snowy winter is never so severe as one

when this natural feature is wanting. Whenever snow does not fall abundantly towards the end of August, it is a sign that the cold weather which will come in December and January will be such as the inhabitants of more genial climes cannot even faintly conceive any idea of. It is a terrible time for every living being. The poor fellows whom fate or their occupation has thrown into these latitudes have to hoard most carefully all their food and fuel, as, with the first appearance of Arctic frosts, all communication ceases. When passing from house to house, it is necessary to cover up, not only the whole body, but even the face and eyes, as any member exposed to the cold freezes off instantly, and even our most subtle sense, the sight, can be quenched for ever.

Between the houses at Turukhansk a rope is stretched, so that those who cannot help going out may hold on to it, and, having their faces all muffled up, may thus find their way.

Though the description of the climate of the Arctic circle is outside the programme I have laid down, I have slightly enlarged upon the conditions of life among the Europeans inhabiting these dead latitudes for the purpose of showing more clearly the endurance of the

primitive races with regard to atmospheric conditions. Unfathomable, truly, are the mysteries of human nature! Where men of Japhet's race, though inured from infancy to the severity of the climate, are forced to use artificial means to battle with the frost, which stops their very breath, freezes their eyes, and congeals the blood in their veins, there the primitive Semitic tribes, made in the same fashion and similarly organized, brave the cold with impunity, and seem not to feel the tortures of a cold which cuts stones and splits rocks. The Ostiaks, covered, it is true, from head to foot with fur-skins, move freely on their snow-shoes over the white shroud, whilst the most reckless European dares not take a step outside his tightly closed cabin-door. Tall, well-built, and muscular, they mock the low temperature, and, as the fabulous Salamander in the fire, so they pass their life freely in a cold which makes one think of Saturn, Uranus, or any other distant planet in our solar system.

During the long winter night which extends over several months and is only lighted up by the splendour of the Aurora, they hunt the white bear, making long excursions over the snow-clad expanse.

Their wives, faithful companions, share all their toils, and accompany them on all their travels, carrying their new-born babes on their backs in little scooped-out wooden troughs. Their sagacity in avoiding all sorts of dangers during the long night is most astonishing. Their skates, or rather snow shoes, six feet in length, which they put on when travelling, keep them from sinking in the snow, which, though always frozen, is nevertheless soft in some places from the heat radiating from the earth.

A false step in such a place is the knell of sudden death. A man walking on the white carpet suddenly disappears in an abyss of snow and is seen no more; only when the summer comes, and the surface level is lowered some score of feet, are his remains discovered. The Ostiaks, however, whether through instinct, or from being better acquainted with the laws of Nature in their locality, seem to foresee the treacherous places, and to be aware of their vicinity.

During the summer the Ostiak and his family live almost entirely on the rivers, and thousands of small boats, hardly appearing above the surface of the water, are seen moving in all directions on the gigantic Yenisei. Surrounding the steam-

ers, their owners offer European travellers fish, venison, reindeer, and bear skins, in exchange for whisky, tea, or shining beads. The character of this nation is a mixture of southern cunning and northern good-nature; very crafty in commerce, they make up for this fault by the modesty and kindness they display in all their other relations with strangers. The soulless apathy which seems to be one of the distinguishing characteristics of the inhabitants of the Arctic regions is not shared by them. Talkative, curious, highly-interested in everything that is novel or unknown, they seem to make up by their gestures for their lack of knowledge of the Russian language, and their mimicry often paints so graphically their sentiments and wishes that even without an interpreter they generally make themselves understood. Always poor, and living from hand to mouth, seeking food only when actually in want of it, they do not feel their misery and poverty, and have no wish to escape from the limited circle of daily wants. The few weeks of summer, that melancholy smile of the northern sun, is the season during which they seem to revive under the warmth and light which are so charily given to these parts.

Their activity, rapid journeys, and the large

number of boats plying on the Yenisei are the best proofs that they breathe more freely in the warm air, and try to make the most of every day, almost of every moment of their brief semblance of life. They will not believe that far away, beyond forests and mountains, there are lands in which summer is longer than winter, and still further to the south, lands where ice and snow are unknown. When they are told of people living in an ever warm atmosphere, amid green woods and beneath spreading trees, in meadows covered with flowers, a smile of happiness settles on their countenance, and they listen to these descriptions like Mahometans to the story of the seventh heaven, enchanted by the picture presented to their imagination, but unable to comprehend that such happiness can ever be the lot of man during his pilgrimage on earth.

Having passed Turukhansk, man is very rarely seen ; only during the annual fair at Ockhotsk a settlement some five hundred versts to the north, where Russian merchants sometimes congregate, can one see sledges drawn by reindeer hastening to this furthest point of exchange and mart.

The Yenisei fisherman, however, reach as far

as the Arctic Ocean, finding a temporary rest in a small settlement, Khantaisky, the frontier station of the Arctic pole. Further north than this there is yet a convent, the monks who inhabit it holding no communication whatever with the outside world. The history of this retreat of humility and abnegation of all earthly things is shrouded in the obscurity of distance, cold, and vast expanse. The monks who live there never leave the living grave they have voluntarily made for themselves; their simple wants are supplied by the Ostiaks, who alone can traverse these dark, pathless tracks without loss of life or injury.

The rocky eminence, surrounded by icebergs, on which the monks have built their wooden house, protected by a thin layer of lichens, is the most northerly spot on the earth inhabited by Europeans; even the Ostiaks, who seem to laugh at the cold, and are accustomed to combat with this murderous climate, do not willingly venture so far north, and it is only the indescribable admiration which they feel for these forsaken hermits which makes them go thither sometimes to bring fish or firewood for the wants of the monastery.

Further north there is nothing, neither man

nor animal, nor anything endowed with organic life—nothing but the polar ice, immoveable, unchangeable, everlasting—a fearful picture of death, knowing neither end nor limit. Twice have we reached a point where no life is seen, where the motion of our earth slackens, and where all seems to point to the eternal stagnation of the pole. It is time to turn back, especially as, describing all the Siberian tribes, I have not yet mentioned the Tartars, amongst whom I have dwelt for several years.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TARTARS.

THE southern parts of the province are peopled by Asiatic Tartars. These Tartars have nothing save the name in common with the dwellers in the Kazan province. The descendants of the nations which originally composed the Kazan principality are Mahometans, cover their shaven heads in Turkish fashion, and in features resemble their cousins of the Bactziserai and other parts of the Crimea, whereas the nation which I shall describe are of Mongolian descent, of Shaman faith, and in their customs and modes of life differ but slightly from the Chemites.

Although the history of the Asiatic tribes is obscure and unknown, certain circumstances lead one to surmise that they too must have

been under the power of the Dzingistan during the middle ages, and added their contingents to the innumerable masses which, like a destroying wave, poured from time to time over the west, carrying everywhere death and desolation. The hero of their songs, the mysterious, gigantic being of whom all the bards of the desert sing, must have been a chief who led them a few centuries ago to the Sclavonic land to murder and rapine.*

Many parts of the clothing of the Siberian Tartars bear a close resemblance to the dress of Russian boyars and old Polish magnates, which these Sclavonians must have adopted from their savage enemies. In the Tartar language we find many words taken bodily out of our own tongue (Polish), which lead one to believe that there were close relations between them and our ancestors. On the other hand, with the exception of these small indications, no other proofs seem to bear out this supposition.

An ethnographical investigator trying to fathom the history of tribes living in a state

* This hero lives in the songs of almost all Asiatic tribes. I have mentioned him before when speaking of the Tunguz songs.

of nature, so as to be able to draw conclusions therefrom, is inevitably stopped at the outset by the complete absence of historical traditions or legends, and is forced to use as the basis of his investigations insignificant details, which, like the treacherous will-o'-the-wisp, sometimes warn, but oftener far lead astray.

The extensive steppes stretching from the left bank of the Yenisei and occupying the whole western side of the Minusinsk province constituted the chief home of the Tartars. They also inhabited a part of the Tomsk and Tobolsk provinces. Like the Tunguz in some things, they differ from them in greater sociability.

The Tunguz seldom unite into a village or settlement, whereas amongst the Tartars one hardly ever meets a solitary hut, but camps of a few score, or even some hundreds, of huts. Authority is of two kinds with them, as with almost all the other tribes, general and local. The first never interferes in the internal Tartar affairs, and is only seen when a crime has been committed which requires punishment; ordinary matters, such as repairing injustice, the punishment of petty thefts,

payment of debts, &c., are dealt with under the jurisdiction of the settlement.

The representatives of this steppe authority are called Kniaziki (petty princes) chosen from among the Tartar population for three years, and meet occasionally to discuss the affairs of the country. Though, according to the letter of the law, a Kniazik has a very circumscribed power, and though the meetings are only for the purpose of preventing interference from the legal authorities, whose ignorance of the local religious observances often exercises a baneful influence, yet in truth the power of these desert princes is unlimited, they judge and punish on the spot according to their personal ideas. Thus it often happens that the same misdeed which is severely punished by one judge, receives but a slight admonition from another, and legal investigation only takes place when the crime has been of a very serious character, and the knowledge of it has spread abroad sufficiently to take it out of Tartar jurisdiction. Thus the Tartars, though belonging to the natives composing the Siberian empire, still form a separate body, differing from the incomers not only in religion but in all the characteristics of

a different descent. In the yourt ssituated in the vicinity of European dwellings they involuntarily assume the outward signs of civilized nations, but, as the distance increases, so do these signs gradually vanish till they finally disappear altogether.

The interior of a yourt, as in the case of all nations living in a state of nature, presents a picture of wretchedness and carelessness for the future; dirt, stench, and the smoke which fills it, strike a stranger at the very threshold; and, when his eyes become used to the semi-obscurity which generally prevails, the objects that meet them would cause an unconquerable disgust were they not powerfully counteracted by the hospitality and simplicity of the inhabitants. The host welcomes the often perfectly unknown guest as his dear and honoured friend, gives up the best seat, treats him to the best food and drink, and bids his family anticipate his slightest wish. In a word he tries to practise the great virtue of eastern nations which in Europe has only been thoroughly understood and practised by Sclavonians, and which bids a man consider the stranger who visits his abode as a brother sent to him by Providence, to be sheltered in need and defended in dan-

ger, and with whom the last morsel is to be shared.

With the exception of blankets laid down everywhere, which serve as beds for the family, there is no furniture in a yourt; a copper kettle, a piece of compressed tea, a few wooden basins and cups comprise the entire household utensils. In the darkest corner a clumsily carved statue of one of the gods is to be found, and a sacred picture hangs on the walls: these are the religious demonstrations of the household. The Tartar, according to the frame of mind he may be in, mutters charms and invocations to his pagan god, or crosses himself and prays to the Christian saint depicted on the walls of his house. And these two lines of devotion do not seem to clash in any way; on the contrary, he seems to have double assurance of the fulfilment of his wishes. The more benefactors one has, he says, the more sure one ought to be of being befriended in time of need; what his own god Tengri is unable to do, the foreign saint will be sure to accomplish; thus, by keeping well with both, he fears neither and gains double profit.

One neighbour visiting another enters the house without a word of salutation, but sits

down in silence and lights his pipe, and only after some time the ordinary welcome takes place, which consists of putting the right hand on the forehead. If a man wishes to show his friendship to a friend or relation, he brings with him a dead swan having a red pocket-handkerchief tied round its throat.

This is an exceptionally high mark of respect, esteem, and most sincere friendship and admiration on the part of the guest for his host, and is always most cordially received by the latter, and a valuable gift given in exchange. It should be added, however, that a person whose reputation is not above suspicion never gets such marks of esteem, and that did anyone dare to appear with this gift in the house of a dishonest or disreputable man, in the hope of receiving a present, he would at once become an object of derision to the community, and might even lay himself open to penance decreed by the local Shaman.

The relations of women towards men are very strange among the Tartars. According to their religious ideas women occupy a much lower grade of society than men, and yet in the family circle it is the woman who rules everything, including the husband himself, who, in spite of his

patriarchal dignity, is in truth only the humble performer of his wife's wishes.

The slavery of woman has become a form which, though still ostensibly preserved, is recompensed a hundredfold by the influence which these seemingly-weak creatures exercise over the affairs of the household. This state of things arises not only from the greater subtlety of the female character. but also from the habit of marrying very young boys to girls considerably older than themselves. It often happens that a Tartar having a son of thirteen or even twelve, gets him a wife over twenty. After the marriage ceremony the young husband, who has hardly merged from babyhood, takes his wife to a separate yourt. Neither his age, nor his physical strength, nor his habits admit of his performing all the duties of married life, and he becomes more the ward than the protector of his wife, and of course this state of things makes it out of the question for the boy to take the place of head of the family.

In this way men get accustomed from youth to look up to women, and, when of more mature age, habit has made obedience a second nature. In the older woman whom they have come to

consider as Mentor, and on whose muscular arm they lean, they see a being sent to lead them, and in spite of traditional forms, which order women to honour and obey man, they are in fact absolute mistresses and rulers in all domestic matters.

The form of female dependence is only observed in the relations between father-in-law and daughter-in-law. A Tartar woman upon entering a yourt where her father-in-law is, covers her head with a pocket-handkerchief, and puts a sort of long night-gown over her other clothes. On leaving his presence she has to retire backwards without once turning her face away from him. She can never address him herself, but only through the medium of a third person, *i.e.*, her words must be addressed to some one else present, who repeats them to the patriarch of the house; the answer is returned in the same roundabout way.

This habit is occasionally dispensed with, especially when no stranger who is likely to let the Shaman know happens to be present. But except in these cases, and more especially when people not belonging to the family are in the vicinity, this habit is strictly adhered to.

The Sunday dress of the Tartars consists of

trousers and a tightly-fitting rich silk coat without sleeves, and a very large cap trimmed with sable; this cap, which they wear on week-days as well, strikes every Sclavonian by the close resemblance it bears to those worn by our own (Polish) ancestors, and makes one think of the influence this wild horde must have had on the lands they visited. Its shape and the way in which it is worn seem to recall to one's mind similar head-dresses seen in youthful days in old family portraits. The women wear wide, eastern-like trousers, over which they put on a sort of coat with such a long waist that the button and button-hole meet below the knees. The ungracefulness of this dress is redeemed by the head-dress, which is both original and pretty. The ebon hair of the girls is plaited in a multitude of little plaits, and covered by a bright, coloured handkerchief, twisted very gracefully into a kind of Turkish turban. The Tartar women wear earrings, or rather hoops of brass wire, which are sometimes from five to seven inches in length.

Their neck is adorned with rows of silver or even gold coins, but more especially with rows of coral, which are very highly esteemed by them, and considered the greatest ornament.

Every father or husband tries to get, were it ever so few, large corals for his wife or daughter, which are worn on all festive occasions, and are handed down as heirlooms.

The Shaman religion of this people, besides the general characteristics of other peoples of the same religion, possess a few special rules in addition.

Wherever in the course of this narrative I have had to mention the religion of the different races living in the proximity of Mongolia, Thibet, Japan, China, Persia, or the borders of the Ganges, and having no one point of union which would cause the Shamans to unite in one perfectly identical religion, we have ever seen in each of them different shades of religious belief. This arises from the lack of union among the many different Asiatic hordes; one race is often ignorant of the very existence of another. The immense distances, the want of land or water communication, and the difference of climate between northern, central, and southern Siberia cause each tribe to interpret the Shamanism somewhat differently, though conforming strictly to its broad doctrines. These differences arise from their various ideas and habits, and thus the religion loses somewhat in

unity. This difference is seen more clearly in the votaries of the Black Faith,* who inhabit the shores of Saghalien or the banks of the Ganges. There the distances are greater still, and the means of communication almost nil, and therefore the differences in the common faith are much more marked.

The Tartar Shamanism resembles most that of the Tunguz sect. I do not mean the tenets regarding the white or black god, because this belief is prevalent everywhere; but I allude to the exterior forms and ceremonies attached to this faith. The incantations made by the fire in a field to the good or bad god are made in the same manner as among the Tunguz; the sole difference consists in the dress of the priest. The Tartar Shaman, when invoking his god, puts on a fur coat with the fur outside and adorned with many rags, which, together with an enormous cap and his covered face, gives him the appearance of a scarecrow; he throws handfuls of camomile on the fire—this herb growing wild on the steppes is believed to possess mysterious and magical virtues.

The days consecrated to invocations are rigid-

* The word Shamanism, literally translated, means 'black faith.'

ly fixed, but in addition to these there are other festivals, the object of which is to prevent cattle disease, and three times a year there is a pilgrimage to the graves. During the former festival a sheep is killed, its blood sprinkled over the earth, a few pieces of its flesh are thrown into the fire, and the rest is eaten, then follows the ceremony of calling upon the white or black god. In the latter festival the steppe population assembles at the place of perpetual repose, both to give due honour to the dead and to beseech the Tengri (spirits of departed ancestors) for the protection of their descendants. The most curious part, however, in the religion of the Tartars are the ceremonies gone through in the yourts, especially during some dangerous illness, and performed at the wish of the family or friends of the sick person. According to their idea, sickness is nothing more than the collection of unclean spirits in the yourt, who persecute the man in their power, and are even able to kill him; it is therefore necessary to banish these evil spirits. To accomplish this, a Shaman is called in, who, to the accompaniment of the music of a drum, calls upon the unseen spirits to abandon their prey and leave the house. Spirits do not like noise, as a rule, and

that is why the drum plays such a prominent part; but, as they are very obstinate, it requires a long time to oust them. It often happens that the Shaman and his myrmidons drum away for days and nights, till either Nature conquers the illness, or the patient sleeps the sleep of death. In the former case the representative of religion triumphs, in the latter he explains that the spirits belonged to a disobedient sort, and were too numerous to yield to the means employed for their expulsion.

This ceremony is conducted in the following manner. The Shaman, entering the yourt, brings with him a drum and a stick covered with leather, which is the symbol of his authority; having placed these in a corner, he proceeds to fumigate the sick man with camomile, after which he begins to drum, striking the instrument gently at first, then gradually louder and louder. The expulsion of unclean spirits takes a long time, extending sometimes over two or three days and nights. During the whole of this time it is strictly forbidden to the inhabitants of the yourt to do any kind of work, to carry on conversation, or to take food. If, through sleep or fatigue, the eyes of one of the company should involuntarily close, the Shaman,

without interrupting his occupation, empties a bucket of cold water on the head of the sleeper, and, if anyone breaks the law of silence, the priest, without a word, takes his leather-covered stick and lays it pretty freely on the shoulders of the offender.

The Shamans dislike to see strangers present at their incantations, though they never show their dissatisfaction to the intruder, but vent their anger on those of their flock who have allowed an outsider to be mixed up in their domestic affairs. One day, not knowing the reluctance of the priests to admit strangers to their ceremonies, and being very anxious to witness the expulsion of evil spirits, I begged for permission to enter a yourt during the religious observance. Arriving early, I established myself in the darkest corner of the room, and covered myself with the blankets accumulated there. The Shaman, who arrived shortly afterwards, did not perceive me at first, and, after fumigating the sick man, began his drumming and fearful cries. I tried to keep as quiet as possible, and through an opening between the blankets I followed attentively all the performance. After an hour, however, the hawk-like eyes of the priest discovered me in my corner.

No sooner had he assured himself of my proximity that he handed the drum to his assistant, and, taking up his stick, he dragged outside successively all the inhabitants of the house, beginning at the eldest and ending with the smallest child, and beat them unmercifully.

I was truly sorry for these poor people, who had to undergo such a severe punishment on my account, and when a few hours afterwards the ceremony came to an end by the death of the patient, and the Shaman had left the house, I tried to explain my sorrow for what they had endured on my account, adding that, had I known the consequences of my curiosity, I would never have begged to have it satisfied.

'No matter,' answered an old man, the father of the deceased, who had experienced even more severely than the others the weight of the Shaman's hand; 'we knew he would find you out sooner or later, but we hoped he would not hit quite so hard. Our Shaman knows his trade better than most priests, though his hand is rather heavy; but then all this will go to the good of the tengri' (soul) 'of my poor son.'

When the Shaman leaves the house after having performed his ceremony, one of the persons present walks or rides before him bear-

ing his stick, the emblem of his dignity. This stick is pretty thick, about six feet long, covered with leather, and furnished at the end with little bells. Anyone can address the pagan priest except the man who carries this mace; in fact, the Shamans are only inaccessible, despotic, and exclusive when they are performing their incantations. No sooner is the ceremony ended than they subside into the order of common mortals, join in anything that may be going on, and, even when taking part in festivities in which aryash is too freely imbibed, they often share the lot of common mortals in finding the stick of a quarrelsome neighbour laid soundly on their back.

The office of Shaman does not pertain to a special caste, and can be filled by anyone who has been brought up to its mysteries from childhood. Parents generally send their children to learn the art; the cleverest and most acute become priests, others attendants on the priests,*

* A Shaman's attendant is called in Tartar language an 'incomplete Shaman;' he fills a secondary place during the ceremonies, and can never become a full Shaman. Sometimes, however, when the Shaman is away his attendant performs his duties, but such an usurpation of power happens but seldom.

and the dull and stupid are sent back to their parents. Either sex can become priests. I have seen old men, middle-aged, and youths, women of a certain age and quite young girls. When a boy or girl has attained the dignity of the priesthood, they have the power to whip old men and even their own parents, if they do not attend to their religious duties, and I have seen parents receive the stripes in silence. It sometimes happens, however, if the operation has been very painful, that after the ceremony, when the parents have regained their moral equality, they pay their children back in their own coin. I have also, when the father of a Shaman was about to administer corporal punishment to his son, heard the latter say, 'I advise you not to beat me, or at the first exhortation of the spirits I will repay you for it.'

It would seem that with such habits the home life of the Tartars must be a sort of anarchy, and that all social relations are upset, but such is not the case; the respect due to the patriarch as head of the family is so great that even such anomalies as these are unable to overthrow it. A father beaten by his son or daughter during a religious ceremony in no wise loses his dignity, as it is not his child but his priest who corrects

him ; as soon as the invocation is over, everything returns to its normal state.

The Tartars who live near Minusinsk almost all speak Russian fairly, but the further they are from that place the less knowledge of Russian is found, and a traveller wishing to visit distant yourts must have an interpreter. A large number of them come every Saturday to Minusinsk to assist at the fair; they generally appear on horseback, dressed in their very best Sunday clothes, the women more especially like to show off their earrings, corals, and pearls. They bring with them the produce of their steppe housekeeping, which consists principally of melted butter; the butter they sell is much cheaper than anyone can get from Russian peasants, but Tartar butter is generally rancid and bitter, owing to its being wrapped in skins, and to sour cream being used in its production.

Tartars who come from a distance can be easily recognised by the curiosity they display; the wooden tower used for signalling in case of fire especially attracts their attention. On meeting well-dressed people in the streets, they doff their caps most humbly,—to their ideas every man not dressed as a peasant must be some very high dignitary.

These people are good-natured, phlegmatic, and hospitable in the extreme; they are grateful for benefits and quick to forget injuries. Their chief vices are dirt, apathy, and love of drink. Often cheated by more cunning races, they have become suspicious in mercantile transactions. Extensive traffic in false notes has made them very chary of taking paper money. When handed a paper note, they turn it once, spread it out in the sun, consult together, and generally return it. For this reason when buying from them it is best to be provided with small silver or copper money. A tendency to theft or dishonesty is seldom seen among them, but through their Mongolian descent they are prone to incest and unnatural crimes. According to their ideas, wrong is only wrong when its consequences are at once apparent, and incest, though to us disgusting, does not seem so to them, it does not belong to the class of crimes which bring loss of life and money to others, and therefore is no crime to them.

Inborn apathy, a want of perseverance, and respect for other people's property keep them from stealing, but, when they do steal, the ingenuity they display leaves other tribes far behind.

Russian pedlars and shopkeepers are in the

habit of selling tea previously weighed off in pound packets, wrapped in pink paper. On fair days large numbers of these packets lie on counters, and buyers look at them, and buy or not according to the price and the length of their purses. Not very long ago a Tartar entered the shop of a Minusinsk shopkeeper, called Nicholas Sharowoff, and, after having inspected all the packets of tea, bought nothing, saying he had forgotten his money. Soon he returned, looked at them once more, but would not agree to the price. A third time he returned, and agreed to pay the price asked, but, as he was taking the money out of his pocket, a Tartar woman, probably his wife, rushed into the shop, and forbade him to give such a price. The obedient husband put down the pound of tea, and left the shop with his better-half. The shopman, used to this kind of transaction, and seeing that the number of packets was correct, did not suspect the fraud. Later on, however, he found that three of the packets contained sawdust. At each visit the Tartar had substituted a packet of sawdust, wrapped up in a similar paper, for a packet of tea. Such things, however, happen but seldom, not only that their easy-

going, good-natured disposition is against it, but they do not possess the cupidity and cunning which are so often found among Siberians.

There have been cases when a Tartar not only received his guest with open arms, but on the departure of the latter presented him with his best horse.

It follows from the character of these people that they are extremely poor, though being satisfied with little, and living outside the pale of civilization, they are unconscious of their poverty, and do not strive to better their lot.

Their chief source of income is from the sale of furs and the breeding of horses. Here and there, however, especially near Minusinsk, they occupy themselves with agriculture and in growing water melons, but these cases are rare, as they have no taste for tilling the soil, and, when one sees them using agricultural instruments, they always seem to do it in spite of themselves. Their great occupation is the preparation of koumiss (mare's milk), which, according to their belief, is a sovereign cure for all the diseases human flesh is heir to; and they even fancy koumiss has the power to assist in casting out unclean spirits. You will not find a settlement in which some old woman is not busy

in preparing this drink; and it is well known that koumiss is really beneficial in some diseases, such as consumption, &c. The doctors of Minusinsk, Atchinsk, and Krasnodiarsk often send their patients into the steppes to take this cure. A place of this kind in the neighbourhood of Minusinsk is called Uprawa Abakanska, which is also under Tartar government. It is neither a village nor a camp, but a conglomeration of all the primitive people. Amid the numerous yourts, several wooden houses built in the European style are to be seen. During the summer, a score or so of people of different classes and sexes come there to take the cure. Those who have been to like places in Europe cannot form the slightest idea of the discomforts, worries, and trouble which the patients sent to these wild parts have to undergo. Nothing can be purchased there save mutton dried in the sun, and living in Tartar yourts full of smoke and stench, and sharing them with whole families of filthy aborigines, is far from agreeable, and can only be fully realized by one who has tried it. It should be added that, though this place is only fifteen versts distant from Minusinsk, it is not easily got at, being separated from it by three arms of the Yenisei, which must be

crossed in punts; so that, though the distance is insignificant, the journey occupies several hours. The Tartar women who occupy themselves with the treatment invest it with all the dignity due to their belief in the efficacy of the cure. Before preparing the drink and beginning the usual incantations, they question the patient closely as to all his habits, tastes, and ways.

In settlements further removed from civilization, a Shaman or his attendant is generally found at the preparation of the medicine, whose muttered invocations, without which no important action or ceremony can take place, go on just the same as in the religious observances. First of all, the mares whose milk is about to be used are fumigated with camomile, the milk, before being allowed to ferment, is charmed, and, when finished and bottled, the liquor is not permitted to leave the hands of the manufacturer without the priest's formal permission. Knowing these customs, Europeans, as a rule, choose settlements situated nearer the towns or European villages, as in such places fear of the authorities who do not encourage Shamanism keeps the practices in check, and the Tartars, loth to part completely from their time-honoured

habits, content themselves with a few inarticulate mutterings.

Besides the marriages I have mentioned between very young boys and girls much older than themselves, one sees sometimes marriages of people well on in years; but such unions may safely be counted as exceptions. The marriage of children seems to be for the purpose of putting a wholesome check on immorality in its very bud, but the remedy does not answer its purpose. Where no virtuous principles exist, where religion is merely a form, and the idea of modesty has never been inculcated into woman, there evil grows spontaneously, like weeds on waste land, and all obstructions set up to oppose it serve only to make the baser side of human nature assert itself the more. Nowhere is female immorality so great as among these tribes steeped in materialism. This immorality does not arise from greed, but has its source in example and the absence of feminine modesty from childhood, a virtue which forms a shield to preserve women from evil instincts. The Shamans, whilst punishing severely outward lapses in religious observances, do not trouble themselves to find fault with what ought to come more especially under their authority. Public

opinion only rises up against consequences, ignoring such crimes as leave no trace behind them; and the patriarchs, following opinion, wink at every fault except such as cannot be concealed.

Such a state of things produces all kinds of diseases, and checks the increase of population. The Tartar girls, afraid above all of their fault being found out, have recourse to the medical skill of old women, who endeavour to counteract the course of Nature by administering herbs and grasses well known to be injurious to health.

On the other hand, it should be said that, if among girls we see very loose habits, the married women, though not quite free from this fault, yield to it only exceptionally. This arises from the curious ideas of these people. A woman considers herself perfectly free and unconstrained till she is married; thus the custom of early marriages, though powerless to prevent immorality, may be understood as having been instituted with this object.

Marriages concluded in later life are always effected by carrying off the bride. When a young Tartar fancies a girl, he never dreams of asking her father for her, but collects his friends, assails her yourt at night, and carries away his

prize. The girl's family give chase, and either recover her, or, as is often the case, are worsted in the encounter, and leave the field to the enemy. In the first case, the assailant retires with shame, or seeks another opportunity; in the latter, the families make peace, and the wedding is celebrated by the Shaman with the usual ceremonies. Frequently before the abduction there is an understanding between the lovers, and even between the families; in such a case the pursuit is only simulated as a form hallowed by custom, but there are cases where not only the relatives, but even the girl herself, are unaware of the coming event, and in such cases the flight frequently ends in bloodshed. In such a case might wins the day, and although the father, the girl herself, or even the authorities of the settlement might object to the marriage no one can prevent it, and the victor carries off his wife, the defeated party must put on the best face they can, and the weeping bride becomes the wife of the man who has won her.

Habit, however, requires that the bridegroom should pay the father-in-law a certain sum in skins, cattle, or horses. The sum fixed on depends on the age and personal charms of the girl and the details of the assault; the more

the girl's friends have suffered in the fight, and the more severe the wounds inflicted, the larger the sokol* (sum paid by the bridegroom). In cases where the fight has been only a feint, the price has been fixed beforehand. If the abduction has been carried out in spite of the girl's family, the price paid for her is fixed by the elders of the settlement, and must be agreed to by both parties.

This barbarous custom of carrying off girls, to which rape is always added, is common to many Siberian tribes, and dates from great antiquity; it prevailed in almost all nations living in a state of nature, and seems to have arisen from their religious ideas and mode of life. Uschold and other searchers into the past consider it to have been the general and only form of marriage. According to others it had a cosmological meaning, and was symbolical of the moon, and therefore 'Hieros Gamos,' or holy matrimony, has become a religious ceremony.

* In all ancient nations the bridegroom had to pay for his bride; in later times, when marriage became an institution, this took the form of a dower given by the parents to their daughter. The sokol of the Tartars, Zarizeban of the Mongolians, and kalim of the Turks which still exist are remnants of this custom.

Vico considers it as the natural consequence of the savage ideas of these nations, who imitated the wild animals of the steppes, with whom might is right and who carry off their prey to their lairs in the desert. This last hypothesis seems to be the most probable one. Among barbarous nations, the rights of property were not respected; they fought either for booty or slaves. From ancient times, savage nations—following mythological examples, where the gods, smitten by the charms of women, carried them off—followed this simple mode of appropriation. Sometimes these expeditions were undertaken for the purpose of carrying off the whole female population of a neighbouring country; for example, the rape of the Sabines by the Romans. At other times, they were only to carry out individual aims. What was the cause of the Trojan war but the abduction of Helen by Paris? And the ancestors of the tribe I am now describing were chiefly influenced in their raids on Russia and Poland by the rich spoil to be obtained, and more especially by the beauty of the Polish and Russian women whom they carried off. Under the influence of such ideas, handed down from generation to generation and strengthened into habit by tradition, the primitive nations

fostered these barbarous customs. In the course of centuries, which modified the outward forms of life, and especially by the barriers opposed by laws and civilization, these customs had to give way to right and justice, and what was once the rule became a mere form now apparent only in the nuptial festivities of the Siberian people.

Such are the habits and customs of Asiatic Tartars. As to their songs, there is little to be said about them. Song, the poetry of nations, does not exist among them, but only a monotonous nomenclature of objects which pass before their eyes, like the Tunguz. As with the latter, a long list of objects passing before our eyes is presented to us. Sense is sacrificed to rhyme; there is no order, no continuous idea running through it. Legends and stories of olden time are not to be found among these people steeped in materialism, the only remnant of antiquity to be found amongst them is the idea of a mysterious colossal being whom they can neither name nor describe. I have several times mentioned this legendary hero, who seems to survive in the memory of almost all Siberian tribes, and who probably may be identified with Genghis Khan, the brave and unconquered

leader under whom numerous hordes of these barbarians used to invade the west, spreading death and devastation in their path.

I was most anxious to trace some connecting link between the present and the past of these nations, and once during my excursions in the steppes, when visiting a settlement near the Chinese frontier, I came upon a tradition which, though lacking details and particulars of time and place and names, seems to bear the characteristics of a national legend founded on actual facts. In this legend, as in all those of the primitive tribes of Siberia, the mysterious impersonation of the heroic leader plays the principal part. In this case it is not Genghis Khan, but another Asiatic leader who seems to be the principal personage. The story is as follows :—

Once upon a time, long, long ago, when Mongolia did not acknowledge the Mantchur yoke, and the Tartar princes were mightier than all the princes of the earth,* one of them, stronger and wiser than the rest, overcame the chiefs of other tribes, and forced them to pay him tribute, and to help him in case of war

* Of course only in a legendary sense.

with other nations. Not only were the Yenisei steppes subject to him, but the Irkoutsk and Amoor provinces, and even the countries of the Ultanghai and Uranhuts (present Mongolia) owned his power, and obeyed his mandates. He was a great hero, firm and severe, but just. Of commanding stature, he was possessed of great strength, and could uproot whole trees, which he used as defensive weapons. All trembled at his power, and admired the wisdom and prudence of his judgments. This mighty chief had a wife of surpassing beauty. She was good, obedient, and gentle, but the smile of happiness never lighted up her features. Her lovely face was like a summer night—bewitching but sad. All who beheld her were entranced by the beauty of that northern star, but could not long contemplate her without grieving at the deep melancholy which brooded over the chieftain's wife.

Her husband, devotedly attached to her, was unhappy on account of her sorrowful appearance, the more so as this melancholy arose from no cause whatever, but her natural disposition. She, loving her husband passionately, did all in her power to look cheerful, but she could not. As well might one wish

for sunshine on a serene summer night as to hope that the signs of grief on her lineaments should give way to a sunny smile. No means were left untried to effect this end. The merriest buffoons were brought from Mongolia, but all their antics, jokes, and wit were of no avail. The sad lady (for by that name she was generally known) looked at all their performances, but the statue-like features seemed to be chiselled in marble, and gave no sign of satisfaction. The despairing husband issued a proclamation throughout his extensive dominions to the effect that whoever should succeed in bringing cheerfulness to his wife would be promoted to the highest dignities. Numerous dependent chiefs arrived, and invented all sorts of jests and tricks, but their efforts failed to relieve the unconquerable melancholy of the princess. The prince, driven to the last extremity, knew not what to imagine—for one smile to light up those death-like features, he was ready to sacrifice half his possessions, but that smile no power had hitherto been able to evoke. At last he took a strange, almost unaccountable resolution—a resolution which could only have been conceived in the brain of an Arctic Tartar prince. There existed in

Asiatic countries from time immemorial a custom that, in case of a sudden war or raid, fires were lighted on all the mountain tops, in order to assemble the subordinate chiefs, and in this way the news spread all over the country and reached its most distant confines. One day the prince ordered these signal fires to be lighted, and soon numerous bands began to arrive with their chiefs and leaders.

There were Mongolians, Sayans, Northern Tartars, and Kirghiz, all these people streamed in by land or water like rivers hastening to join the sea. The astonishment of these legions hastening to war and finding themselves mystified must have been ludicrous in the extreme, as the 'sad lady' burst out laughing at the sight, and her laugh added a thousand new charms to her sweet face. The prince, delighted at his discovery, repeated it several times to enliven his wife, and thus exposed his armies to unnecessary toils and troubles. At last evil days dawned for him, when his empire was assailed by the Mantchurs who spread death and desolation in their path, carrying away as spoil, cattle, horses, and household goods. Seeing ruin threatening him on every side, the Tartar chief gave the signal for war; at his order,

fires were lighted on the mountains bearing news of peril throughout his territory, but this time the oft-deceived vassals did not respond, and he perished miserably, paying with his life for the foolish jest in which he had indulged himself for the sake of a smile from his wife.

Besides this story, which one finds among the Mongolians as well, the Tartars possess no other.

On several occasions sitting by the fire in a yourt with a glass of aryash in hand, or accepting from the patriarch a pipe, the mark of friendship and mutual esteem, I have tried to profit by this moment of friendly intercourse, and have questioned in every way the people present, but all my efforts in that direction failed, so great is the ignorance of these tribes as to the previous history of the northern steppes. They even seem astonished that anyone should care to investigate the by-gone times which will never return, and do not deserve even a remembrance.

Among the Tartars inhabiting the steppes near Minusinsk, dwells a man distinguished from his countrymen by a much higher education. Karki, also called Karkin, is the richest citizen of the desert; his wealth in horses, oxen, furs,

silver, and even in money are considered fabulous; probably imagination, as is usually the case, doubles the riches of this Arctic Crœsus. The bonds of friendship unite me to this Tartar. Many times have I visited him in his yourt in the steppes, fitted up with Asiatic splendour, and he for his part has never passed my modest habitation without paying me a visit. I had hoped that the European ideas of this aborigine, the influence he exercised over his fellow-countrymen, and especially his education, which, though only superficial, still raised him above the sphere of ignorance around him, would help me in my researches into the previous history of these nations. Vain illusion! Karki, who possessed such a rational judgment in almost every matter, who looked upon Shamanism as a relic of barbarism, could not or would not enter into the past history of his country. He looked upon all efforts in that direction as childish and useless, the present was all-in-all to him, and grubbing in the past seemed to him like stirring up cold embers.

The past can never be undone, and the idea of progress, which he loves to talk of though in truth he does not follow it, is the reason that in his opinion, searching the past, so full of dark-

ness, unbridled freedom, and abominations of every description, not only brings no advantage for future generations, but is a positive check, thwarting all efforts in the cause of civilization.

I mention this to explain to the reader the reason why my essays touch so little upon the by-gone history of the tribes I have undertaken to describe. Ethnography, it is true, draws its materials from the present, but the past should serve as a foundation on which to build the existing types; the source from which are derived the habits, customs, and modes of life of the present day. The smallest details, such as dress, the mode of architecture, and apparently insignificant ceremonies, all assist in characterizing nations, the origin of which must be sought for in the dim obscurity of the past. When these fail, the study undertaken becomes most difficult, and the student is forced to draw his conclusions from indications almost imperceptible, and has instinctively to guess at the origin of what he sees.

CHAPTER VIII.

ETHNOGRAPHICAL AFFINITIES.

AFTER having placed before the reader in turn all these obscure tribes barely mentioned in the history of nations, it is necessary to discover the thread that unites them. The prototypes of the tribes we have described, the Mantchurs, Mongolians, Kirghizs, Kamtschatkans, and Finns, belonged to quite different races, and yet there is a certain similarity in the habits, dress, and religious observances of all Asiatic nations. The neighbourhood of these tribes to each other could not account for this, as the deserts of Siberia are so vast that often these tribes scattered amongst its snows were unaware of the existence of others.

Trade and commerce, those uniting links of distant nations, were unknown to them, and

communication was impossible from want of roads and the existence of immense rivers and wide deserts. The wars they waged amongst themselves were naturally confined to small areas; there were in fact no conditions tending to draw them nearer to each other. What then were the causes of the similarity we have noticed in all these different tribes?* To find an answer to this question it is necessary to search far into the past and to study the rite of Shamanism.

Shamanism is undoubtedly one of the oldest religions on earth. In prehistoric times the black faith flourished in the east and south of Asia and more especially in India. Its chief seat was in Attock and Peshawur, in the valleys stretching down from the western slopes of the Hindoo Koosh in the direction of the Caspian and Ural seas, also Iran (Persia) and Turan (Kirghis). In Egypt even, which was relatively the most civilised nation, magic seems to have been nothing else but Shamanism clothed in an attractive form and raised to the status of a science. In China the ancient faith Tao-see, which existed before Confucius, possessed all the distinguishing

* These characteristics are restricted to a few of the customs, religious ceremonies, and sometimes dress. In moral character the tribes differ completely.

features of Shamanism. In a word, this religion spread throughout all southern and eastern Asia to the confines of Mongolia and the province of Stetun-tsin, the bases of the Koosh.

Mountains rising in India being the centre of all Asiatic nations, those anxious to find a light thrown on the ancient history of these tribes should seek it there.

This locality from its very situation seems to possess the necessary conditions. Four immense rivers, rising there and flowing into different parts of the world divide Asia into four parts. The Irtish flows northward into the Arctic Ocean; the Cabul river flowing towards the south joins the Indus, and loses itself in the Indian Ocean. To the east the yellow river of China flowing into the Eastern Ocean, and the Oxus (Amu-Darya) falling into the sea of Aral. Thus Asia divided geographically into four parts, with four different tribes, the Mantchur, Indian, Chuck, and Mongol, possesses the goal towards which all investigations as to previous history must naturally tend.

For one desiring to investigate even approximately the origin of the various tribes distributed over the north, possessing no record of the past either in books or traditions, it is impossible to

omit this source. Sanscrit manuscripts, the world-old Chinese paintings, and the legendary traditions of the Persians and Kirghis, have ever been the foundation and starting point of all historical inquiry into the origin of the Semitic races. The slight vein of historic lore which connects Siberia with other Asiatic countries can only be ascribed to the steady progress of Shamanism from south to north, where new faiths, by enlarging the circle of local ideas, have modified the materialism and cabalistic formulæ of the black faith.

In these primeval times, marked by no dates, were fought many long and bloody wars in Southern Asia between Irans and Turans. These latter, under the general name of Scythians,* made incursions into Persia and Chaldea, and even penetrated as far as Egypt. Chinese history is rich in facts showing the ravages committed by these barbarian hordes. The Irans saw in the juniper-covered Turan a land of darkness, the abode of all evil, the kingdom

* The celebrated Scythian empire, of which Justinian says that 'Non minus præclara initia quam imperium habuit,' was properly situated on the Black Sea, but all nations inhabiting the south-western parts of Asia went generally by the name of Scythians.

of Ahriman (the Evil One); and the chief political business of the Persians, and, after them, of the Perso-Greeks, has been to expel these Kirgis aborigines beyond the river Syrr or Janartes, and to separate them by an impassable barrier from the other nations of Southern Asia.

Having accomplished this after many battles, their sole aim was to effect a moral change, and to free themselves from Shamanism, to which faith they ascribed all the combats undertaken in the name of the black god.*

It was probably then that the ancient faith of Brahma arose. Shamanism gave way to Brahminism, yielding to the moral force of a more enlightened religion.† This took place

* The wars of the Irans and Turans are called in the Vedas the wars of the gods, of the white (Ormuzd) and black (Ahriman). These Sanscrit names answer to the Siberian names of Shama and Si, given by them to the two contending powers.

† The Brahmin religion, though dark and barbarous when compared with the later (504 years B.C.) Budda faith, is still much more lofty in its tenets than Shamanism. We do not find in it that dark power in whose name all crimes were committed with impunity, and some spiritual ideas, though hidden by a cloak of materialism, were beginning to germinate. In every body there is a sort of subtle element, a sort of vapour, which leaves it at death, and enters

slowly; step by step the professors of the black faith, unable to find sympathy from the believers in the migration of souls, insensibly receded northwards. The stations of the ancient commercial route from India to Eastern Siberia, viz., Chizar, Khiva, Bokhara, Khokand, and Tashkend, inhabited by a population descended from the Persians, still bear in their traditions marks of that migration. The Swastics (Sanscrit talismans), hieroglyphics cut on flat stones,* which are found on that line of route, constitute a material proof of the advance of the southerners. At the same time the Obons or pagan cemeteries show the retrograde movement of the Shamans before the advance of a more powerful element.

When, in the course of ages, the religion of Budda arose on the ruins of Brahminism, when

---

another organic body, and the burning of dead bodies was supposed to assist this chemical process. This faint glimmer gives the first idea of a soul, an idea the very rudiments of which are nowhere to be found in Shamanism.

* Swasti is the Sanscrit word for a blessing, hence the word swastic means the consecration of any object. As some of these stones are shaped like the sole of a child's foot, many people of the Indian faith believe them to be the marks of the feet of miraculous children who had passed that way, endowed with sacred powers and expounding the laws of their religion.

the Indian prince, Sakya Muni, began to expound the mysteries of Nirvana, Shamanism, which had hitherto been partially tolerated, received its death-blow. The new ideas, spreading with rapidity, crossed the Himalayas, and flourished not only in the Aleutian Islands, but through the length and breadth of the Celestial Empire as well. A faith whose highest aim was peace, whose doctrine inculcated patience and gentleness, could not amalgamate with one steeped in witchcraft and blood. Thus driven back, the Shamans settled in the ice-bound parts of Asia and Europe,* some even, reaching the rocky shores of Scandinavia, spread around the White Sea, and the Finn races (Laplanders, Samoiedes, &c.) have succumbed to their influence; others settled in Siberia, and inoculated the wandering aborigines with their religious ideas.

What happened in Siberia in these prehistoric times, what tribes peopled her snowy regions, is not known. We can, however, surmise that

* The worshippers of the black faith found now in Southern Asia are merely the relics of bygone ages. Siberia has become the only region in which one finds large numbers of people observing the ceremonies peculiar to that faith.

these polar races must have lived in a semi-bestial state, unacquainted with any religious ideas whatever. This surmise is founded on the ease with which Shamanism must have spread. The black faith, known by all the nations of central and southern Asia to be barbarous, was readily received here. That religion, regarded as barbarous on the shores of the Ganges and the Pei-ho, in the Aleutian Isles, in Turan, and Samarcand, was welcomed in the north as a step towards civilization, and the beginning of a new and better life. It is probable that in ancient times Siberia was occupied by hordes of Chukchas, Finns, and Kirghiz, and that the two most populous races inhabiting there at the present day, viz.: the Mongolians, from whom sprang the Tartars and Yakuts, and the Mantchur, the ancestors of the present Gilliacks, Sayans, and Tunguz, have come from the west and south during this change in the religious ideas, and, having mingled with the previous settlers, gave rise to the present varieties.

As there are no traditions and not a vestige of history, all these surmises are only founded on the different types of the tribes we have been examining, as well as on some facts taken from the history of Southern Asia, and a few vestiges

of Mongolian lore, viz.: the book of Bogdohan,* in which all the names are Sanscrit, and seem to recall the peregrinations of these tribes. Mantchuria and Mongolia were some score of centuries ago two mighty nations; they came seldom, if at all, into contact with the northern countries, the innate pride of the former and the strength of the latter prevented them from amalgamating with the savage hordes dispersed over the snows of the pole; if we find there many Mantchur and Mongolian races among the aborigines of Siberia, it is probably owing to Shamanism driven northwards by the persecuting Brahminist.

Shamanism, having once become acclimatised in Siberia, has lasted for centuries without in the least degree changing its form or barbarous nature. The powdery condition of the bones found in the Obons points to its having originated in very ancient times corresponding to the epoch of the rise and spread of Buddism in central and southern Asia.† All the bloodiest ceremonies of this terrible faith, such as human sacrifices,

* The Mongol book of Bogo-Gesser-hana is well known to German Oriental scholars, and was published in St. Petersburgh in 1836.

† Revue des deux Mondes, LVII, page 615.

voluntary suicide, painful and disgusting tattooing of the body, have been preserved in their pristine rigour up to the end of the last century, and only since then have they begun to yield to Russian civilization. Remains of the victims of these barbarities are still found in the Tartar Obons, and the Gilliack customs; the remnants of tattooing, may still be traced on the faces of old Tunguz. At every step we are met by relics of a terrible past which, like uncanny ghosts, rise up before us and proclaim the bygone savagery of these Arctic tribes.

From the White Sea to the Sayans and Altai Mountains, and from the Ural to Kamtschatka, Shamanism has recorded its existence in indelible characters. It is, therefore, scarcely to be wondered at that this horrible faith, which is perhaps the most ancient on the face of the earth, having so long flourished in Siberia, should in the course of time have given to the various tribes the same general characteristics. The same religious observances, and more especially unconditional obedience to the priests, are the causes which unite almost imperceptibly all the scattered Siberian tribes. Everywhere the opposing influences of the good god and bad god are admitted, everywhere the latter re-

ceives from them more respect and worship from his power of doing harm than does the former from his pity and love. At every point of these immense snowy wastes, the aborigines, owing to the entire absence of any elevated ideas in their religion, worship evil as a god, darkness as a power, and regard religion as a scourge.

The heavenly bliss of Christianity, the perfect peace of Buddism, and even the primitive idea of setting free the soul from its bonds of flesh in the Brahmin faith are here replaced by terror of the evil god, which, like their long Arctic night, seems to cover as with a pall the mental capacity of these people, smothering any spark of love, any tendency to better things, or any knowledge of social laws which might exist among them.

The signs of a departure from this time-hallowed condition are so very few and far between, so superficial and insignificant, that they can only serve to show that the present stagnation may perhaps in time give way to more civilized ideas. Difficult as it is in this desert land to trace its past, the task seems light compared with the much more difficult one of predicting even approximately the time when darkness will give place to light, and

savage customs be changed into charity and love. One thing, however, I can say with certainty, having for many years inhabited these regions, studied the various nationalities, their habits and customs; I can see that these good days will only dawn when Russian civilization shall have reached the furthest confines, and the mighty power of steam shall have brought new life in its train; when the last Shaman, having disappeared from the face of the earth, shall live only as a sad memory, and the servants of Christ, full of the sanctity of their calling, shall spread the gospel among these barbarian hordes, teaching them the love of God and one's neighbour, the forgiveness of injuries, and the nobler calling of man.

Owing to exceptional social conditions, and the great distance from the centre of civilization, the agricultural class in Siberia is distinguished by peculiar characteristics.

Though possessing no past history—as the fathers, or at any rate the grandfathers, of the present settlers all came from distant climes, bringing with them different habits and customs—still Siberia has a strange power which seems thoroughly to change all foreigners in an incredibly short time. All their virtues, vices,

and peculiarities are reduced to one uniform level. Whether the cause of this rapid metamorphosis is in the climate, the entirely different social conditions, or the difficulties of communication with other countries, is hard to tell; but one thing is certain, that not only Russians, but Frenchmen, Germans, and Swedes, who have lived in Siberia for any length of time, gradually lose their different characteristics and acquire the ways of the land they inhabit.

This law, of course, acts with double force on uneducated peasants born and bred amid Siberian snows and ice, and who have been accustomed to call Siberia their home. Their vices seem to have become congealed, and do not thaw at the teachings of morality and kindness. Of religion they only see the outward form, their surroundings bring nothing but bad examples before their eyes, and any innate good qualities they may possess are smothered by traditions of crime handed down from father to son.

The chief characteristics of Siberian peasants are great cunning, first-rate abilities, unfettered by any fine feelings, extreme laxity of morals, and a belief in witchcraft and superstition. Their craft and cunning, partly inherited from

their mothers and partly learnt from the Chinese and Mongolians, is so wonderful that the wariest and most circumspect European is invariably cheated by them in his business dealings. When trading, they can assume the most good-natured persuasion, and at the same time profit by the slightest opportunity; they flatter, appear to agree to every proposal, and in the end achieve their object. The only drawbacks to their cunning are the vice of drink, to which they are prone, and their belief in every sort of superstition; so that, when petty travelling-merchants want to strike a bargain with them, they invariably place a bottle of 'vodka' (whisky) on the table before commencing business, and, should this fail, they have recourse to the first superstition they can think of, and thus get the better of the uncivilized moujik.

It is well-known that a mind clouded by the fumes of alcohol is easily overcome; so in these bargains, in which the bottle plays a conspicuous part, the victory is to the one who has the strongest head, or the presence of mind to spill his liquor under the table. It is very curious to observe the profit made out of the peasants through their superstitions. Travelling colporteurs always provide themselves with an

abundance of miraculous articles, such as amulets, forks which, presented at a person, are supposed to overcome his or her indifference, glasses for preventing the effects of the evil eye, chalk for drawing cabalistic signs. The sale of these and like things brings them in large profits. These colporteurs are usually village-clerks who have lost their places through drink, or adventurers sent to Siberia as a punishment for their misdeeds. These people wander from settlement to settlement charming away mice, locusts, &c., and curing every disease under the sun by supernatural means. The following anecdote will give an idea how deeply rooted is the belief of the people in supernatural agencies.

During my stay in the country, I was in the habit of changing every now and then a few roubles, so as to have the change I required for every day purchases. These coppers I generally kept in a large, old leather gauntlet, bought originally at Tobolsk. Out of this gauntlet I used to get the money I required, and took care always to have the requisite change at hand. The neighbouring peasants and their wives came to me to sell eatables, and when paying them I invariably had recourse to

the old gauntlet. One of the moujiks with whom I dealt oftener than the others asked one day,

'Tell me how it is that, though you neither plough nor reap, yet you never seem to be short of money?'

'I have but little money,' I answered. 'All my treasure is in this gauntlet.'

'And when it is empty, what then?'

'It never gets empty. Just think how long you have been coming to me, selling all sorts of provisions, and you always have seen me take money out of it, and not once have you seen it fail.'

'True,' answered the moujik. 'It is a miraculous glove.'

'A wise man gave it to me,' I added. 'As fast as money is taken out of it, it fills itself again, and so on for ever!'

'Wonderful,' said the man, crossing himself several times.

I said this purposely, so as to divert their attention from the larger sum which I kept in a pocket-book, in case I should be robbed—a very frequent event in these parts. I knew that, after what I had said, the theft would be confined to the glove, in whose wonderful pro-

perties they believed, and so save me from a more serious loss.

The peasant pondered deeply over what I had told him, and went away; but that very same day he returned with an invitation that I should go and see him. On my refusing, he took a bottle from his coat, and begged that I would drink with him. Knowing their love of money, I knew he would not be thus treating me for nothing; there must therefore be a cause for his liberality. This was not long in coming to light. When, after a long conversation, he found that he could not prevail on me to drink with him, he pulled out a dirty rag, and, having unfolded it, handed me a few paper roubles.

'Here are fifteen roubles. They are yours; take them.'

'Mine?'

'Yes. I wish to buy your leather glove. Why should you soil your hands with copper? Roubles are cleaner, and fifteen roubles is a large sum for a man to possess.'

I was speechless with astonishment. How easy it is, thought I, to deceive these cunning Siberians as soon as one works on their belief in the supernatural.

I told the peasant I would not part with my miraculous gauntlet for any money, and sent him home. A few days afterwards the gauntlet disappeared suddenly; luckily the loss was small, and amounted only to a few score of coppers. I filled another similar glove with money, condoling loudly with the unlucky finder of the former one. 'That glove was useful only to me, it will inevitably bring disease and fearful misfortunes to whoever has it,' I used to say. A day had scarcely passed before I found my wonderful glove thrown down on my doorstep with all the money it had contained.

Siberians are most cunning and crafty in all cases where they do not imagine any supernatural agency to be at work. They can fathom at once all human weaknesses and vices, and turn them to account. They can change their face, and modify their voice, and even squeeze a few tears when necessary, certain that they will be aided in this comedy by all their fellow-countrymen. Even the children are so accustomed to this atmosphere of deceit as to assist, and lie without a stammer.

In such a state of things, where an eye to the main chance is the sole object, the highest attributes of the mind and heart cannot flourish.

Family relations are based solely on mutual necessity. Parents mourn only the loss of grown-up children who were a help to them in their housekeeping, and children anticipate impatiently the death of old and decrepit parents. They do not in any way hide these feelings, and one may often hear a son or daughter coolly making preparations for the funeral, or relating their plans with regard to the inheritance, beside the bed of a sick parent.

It is lucky when want of feeling shows itself merely in apathy. Government chronicles are full of the records of crimes committed among relatives.

Another fact worthy of notice is that, among all the crimes committed, none are perpetrated through passion; revenge against an enemy or the jealousy of a betrayed husband are feelings entirely unknown, thirst of gain or drunkenness are the sole causes of crime. A cold, almost thoughtless cruelty takes the place of passion.

The entire absence of sympathy with the sufferings of any animal, and especially of man, is imbibed into a child's first ideas; it is the effect of habit, and the coldness of heart fostered by habit. The father, as a rule, takes his young sons to help to break-in horses, and thus a boy

learns early to witness most fearful tortures which the poor wild horses have to undergo in this truly barbarous custom.* From the baby in arms to the old man no one understands the meaning of sympathy or pity, and, should ever such an institution as a society for the protection of animals be started in Siberia, its members would soon be obliged to abandon their noble efforts from the sheer impossibility of carrying them out. Here is an example :—

One fine summer morning I slung my gun over my shoulder and went out for a walk. Beyond the village I observed a light smoke rising from the bushes. Upon approaching the spot a disgusting sight met my eyes. A boy of about twelve had hung a dog by the legs to a pole planted in the ground; underneath he had lighted a fire and was slowly roasting the wretched creature to death. The unfortunate

* Breaking-in horses is done in the following fashion :— A peasant requiring a horse chooses one out of a stud of wild animals and at once harnesses him to a heavy sledge. The horse, accustomed to the freedom of the steppes, fights and kicks, whereupon the moujik beats him with a stick or goads him with a sharp iron until the poor beast, overcome by the torture, gives-in and becomes docile. It sometimes happens, however, that the steed prefers to die rather than be mastered.

animal was writhing in torture and howling piteously; a few other children were admiring the sight and clapping their hands for joy.

'Boy, what are you doing?' I cried, indignantly.

'I am torturing a dog,' said the boy, calmly, at the same time heaping more fuel on the fire, as if he were giving the simplest piece of information.

'And why?' asked I, trembling with rage.

'Because I have nothing else to do; father is chopping wood, and mother is washing linen in the river, so, to while away the time, I am roasting this dog.'

'How dare you do so?'

'It is my dog; I can do with him what I like —no one can prevent me.'

Seeing that I could not awaken any feeling in the child, and unable to bear such a sight, I took aim with my gun, and the victim of this innocent pastime hung dead over the rising flames.

The child began to cry and scream.

'He spoiled my fun, he killed my dog. I will complain to father; and he will teach you sense.'

At the sound of the child's shrieks, the father

came out, hatchet in hand, and with him a couple of elder boys. Having found out how the matter stood, he said to me,

'This cannot be; you will not escape scot-free. I will soon teach you what it is to meddle with other people's property.'

My situation was becoming very critical. Luckily, just then the village clerk passed by, and, on hearing all about it, smoothed the peasant down by the promise of a large sum from me.

The village clerk is a great personage in these parts; so the peasant, after a few preliminary grumblings, agreed to the payment.

'Why have you done this?' said the clerk. 'Without the slightest cause, you have got yourself into trouble and expense. Our peasants are vindictive, and do not like to be interfered with.'

'Without cause? Why, that boy was torturing a poor dog!'

'He had a perfect right to do so; it was his own dog. Why interrupt a child in his play, when he was doing no harm to you or anyone else?'

Seeing that all discussion was useless, I thanked my protector for his ready aid and

turned homewards. I overheard him, however, saying to his wife,

'Curious ideas! a perfect absence of respect for another man's property. Why not let a poor child have a little amusement with his own dog?'

Even hospitality, that true Sclavonic virtue, has not become acclimatized in this inhospitable region. The peasants like to visit and treat each other, especially on high-days and holidays; but this hospitality is the result of calculation. When a man is going to visit his neighbour, he never goes straight to the house, but walks along the road, and stops as if by chance at the window and begins a conversation; then, if the master or mistress wishes to see him, they invite him in. The conversation begins by inquiries after every member of the family by name, the samovar is prepared, and, whilst it is heating, the guests discuss the crops, the petty scandal of the place, &c. When the samovar is ready, they drink tea out of saucers, now and then taking a bite of a piece of sugar. In this way they consume about three cups, and then turn the cup upside down, placing on the bottom the remains of the sugar they have been nibbling at. The host and hostess now press

the visitor to have more tea; but that is merely a matter of form, as custom forbids any more being taken.

As soon as tea is over, the guest rises to go, and then the following dialogue invariably takes place:

'Why are you in such a hurry?' says the hostess.

'Time to go home,' answers the guest.

'Stay a little longer.'

'Thank you; you have given us plenty to eat and drink.'

'There was but little.'

'No, there was quite enough; we had plenty.'

This conversation, which always takes place, and is almost mechanically repeated, being ended, the guest approaches the host, and, taking his hands, says,

'I thank you for the vodka, the tea, the cakes, the sugar, &c.'

It is indispensable, when thanking the host to enumerate everything the guest has consumed during his visit. At the end of this catalogue the visitor humbly begs his host to come and see him, which, after a time, he does, and things go on in exactly the same way. Care must be taken that the viands provided

are of equal quantity and quality; if at any time a man eats or drinks more than the host, when his guest, on a former occasion did, quarrels, upbraidings, or sarcastic remarks are the result.

'I gave them tea and sugar, and they gave me nothing but tea;' or, 'I gave them cake, and had nothing but bread in return.'

It often happens that an extra glass of whisky drunk by a guest is the source of long quarrels; the indelicate guest is publicly called a swindler, a worthless fellow; he is pointed at with scorn, and sometimes even beaten. The cause of this behaviour is to be found in their greed. The richest peasants, who spend money on useless trifles, often fight desperately about a glass of whisky which their neighbour has failed to return. It is the outcome of Siberian ideas, according to which there is nothing so humiliating as being 'done,' and nothing so satisfactory as to get the better of another; no wonder, then, that since every cheat is accounted clever, and every cheated one a good-for-nothing idiot, their fear of being exposed to public derision carries them to such lengths.

This strange idea gives rise to many curious customs. If, for instance, one receives a pre-

sent, he ought without loss of time to return one of equal value. There is a special word for this—'oddarit.' A present is frequently given with the intention that the person who receives it may, in the hurry of returning another, give one a trifle greater in value, and thus be an object of ridicule for having allowed himself to be outwitted. If the present sent be of somewhat inferior value, the giver is liable to many disagreeables. The same thing happens if the present be refused.

Stinginess in the true acceptation of the word is unknown among the Siberian peasants. In all that tends to satisfying their wants, and even in gratifying their self-love, they spend freely. The interior and exterior of their houses are proofs of this.

The houses are built in Eastern fashion, surrounded by palisades of wood, and the principal entrance is never from the street, but at the back in the yard. In building they endeavour to obtain as much light in the rooms as possible, and for this reason have many windows, which are profusely adorned on the outside by arabesques deeply carved in wood.

Every house is divided into two parts, the living rooms of the family and the reception

rooms; the kitchen, which is in the former portion, contains a sort of broad sloping wooden shelf, called a 'palata.' Here the Siberian spends the whole day; here he and his family eat, drink, and work. The 'palata' serves as a bed for all those members of the family for whom there is no room on the top of the stove. Regular beds are only used by wealthy people. The 'palata' furnishes them with the acmé of enjoyment; whenever in the course of the day man, woman, or child has a few minutes to spare, they scramble up the 'palata,' and it is difficult to get them down again. Children up to seven years of age, who do not go to work, lie day and night in these upper regions, peeping down every now and then to see what is going on below.

This habit is so universal that, when I inquired one day of the mother of a girl about nine years old what age the child was, she replied, 'For the last two years I have begun dragging her down from the palata.' It is an era in the life of a Siberian.

In this part of the house the heat is intolerable both night and day, and liable to cause headache. The Siberian peasant likes to regularly bake himself; they heat the stove con-

tinually, and close it before the coal is quite burnt out, causing an unhealthy escape of gas. Habit makes them little susceptible of the ill effects of this, but sudden deaths frequently result from it. On the other hand, the drawing-room is cleanly whitewashed.

With the wealthier peasants, who possess houses with two stories, the reception-rooms are on the ground floor, the upper floor, which sometimes has as many as three or four rooms, contain the living rooms of the family. The cleanliness is exemplary. The floors, benches, chairs, and tables are scrubbed every Saturday, and there is always a thick layer of straw on the kitchen floor to preserve it from being soiled by untidy feet.

The picture of Our Saviour, or perhaps a saint, is placed in a corner; the picture is covered with plated metal in such a fashion that only the face and hands, adorned with small branches of ivy, are visible; in front of it is hung a lamp, or small candles are stuck round, which are lighted on high-days and holidays. On entering the room a peasant bows to the picture; this is repeated before meals and on retiring to rest.

Prosperity and wealth are almost universal,

as serfdom was never known in these parts; the virgin soil yields plentifully without toil or labour. The ease with which cattle are kept, where everyone can have as much hay as he chooses to cut, admits of many agriculturists possessing immense herds of horses, cows, and sheep, and were it not for the deeply-rooted love of drink their wealth would be much greater. A Siberian rustic has always a well-stocked larder; before winter sets in they lay up stores of frozen meat, fish, and all kinds of game, which cost nothing; but the mode of preparing these viands is such that European palates find them difficult to swallow. Not only do they never touch fresh meat, but even fish is not considered fit to eat till it begins to go bad; and such a dish, which would be both unwholesome and disgusting to an inhabitant of civilized countries, is to them not only acceptable but perfectly innocuous. In summer they eat raw vegetables in lieu of fruit, which does not grow in Siberia. In addition to wild berries, always gathered unripe, and cucumbers, which rank amongst the choicest delicacies, they consume large quantities of green peas in their pods, as well as the young shoots and buds of many field-plants. At that time of year people walk about with their

pockets full of these delicacies, and, on meeting a friend or neighbour, treat them to some of the stores they have about them. One may frequently see friends standing in the road and filling their mouths with this green stuff, which would inevitably make a European feel very ill; the dead silence which then reigns is only interrupted by the crunching of the pea-pods or cucumbers.

In addition to this perverted taste arising from the rarity of communication with cities in which the inhabitants, travelling Russian merchants, acquire a mode of living approaching somewhat more nearly to the European fashion, there is an entire absence of æsthetic ideas of beauty. Examples of the fact are not wanting. Siberian women are eminently handsome, but from the materialism that prevails only those features which most appeal to the senses are appreciated.

Large, fat women of herculean frame are here considered as types of female loveliness. I once saw a lovely girl of sixteen, her skin white as marble, long tresses of soft, silken curls falling over alabaster shoulders, small, willowy form, sad, violet blue eyes, and bewitching smile; she would have been a treasure to an

artist in search of an ideal. Here she was considered ugly!

'Poor little worm,' her father used to say, 'it is lucky my purse is not quite empty, or she would find it difficult to find a husband, such a small, pale, wee thing as she is. How much better off is my neighbour; when his daughter Nilila walks across the room the boards vibrate, but mine, even if she runs, makes no more noise than a fly. Such a poor, shadowy thing; it really is a pity, as she has plenty of sense, and is a good, industrious, obedient girl.'

So saying, he sadly hung his head, thinking of the injustice of fortune, which had so richly endowed his neighbour's daughter with the weight of five poods, and granted barely three to his.

Peasant girls do not as a rule work in the fields, except the daughters of poor parents who cannot afford to keep as many labourers as are necessary to till the fields; their hands are white, they assist their mother in the cares of housekeeping, and occupy their spare time in sewing or Berlin wool-work. They dress inordinately on Sundays and *fête* days.

In no country have I seen the country people so richly dressed as in Siberia. On these occa-

sions they generally wear silks, or even satins, patent-leather boots, fine cloth cloaks or pelisses lined with ermine. They are so partial to bright colours that, seeing them come out of church on a Sunday, one cannot help comparing them to humming birds or paroquets. Almost every village possesses a milliner, who is a kind of oracle on the subject of fashions, which arrive late in Siberian towns, and, by the time they have penetrated to the villages, have long been forgotten in Europe; for example, the crinoline, long since banished from civilized countries, flourishes there; every girl tries to possess one, and, when unable to purchase it, has recourse to all sorts of ingenious devices to make it. Some sew ropes of straw inside their dresses, which, continually bending and falling to pieces, produce rather a startling effect; others have recourse to wooden hoops, which often break with a loud crack or bodily fall off.

This inordinate fondness for dress is the cause of the fearful demoralization which prevails among the women of these parts, a demoralization all the more deplorable as it arises neither from the heat of the climate nor the vicinity of large cities; it is simply the result of cold

calculation, and does not even assume the garb of passion or the mask of virtue. A pure woman soils herself deliberately, without a struggle or a qualm of conscience; before her fall she received no credit, after it no blame. All this is a common, every-day occurrence, which no one ever takes the trouble to think about, and, should any notice ever be taken of it, it is only when some pecuniary benefit can be obtained. The chief cause of this demoralization is money.

The men are, as a rule, strong, healthy, and well-built. They dress in long coats trimmed with black-cotton velvet, embroidered with flowers and various patterns. The local dignitaries, when in the discharge of their duties, wear leather gauntlets both summer and winter. On meeting a person older than himself, a Siberian peasant considers himself bound to salute him by doffing his cap; when slightly in liquor, he begs to be forgiven for it as well, and when quite drunk he is uproarious and quarrelsome. This seeming-respect is merely an outward form, as they do not honour their parents; but, though only habit, it has taken such strong root that when they want to show attention to a stranger, were he no more than thirty

years of age, they call him an old man, and, on learning his real age, express wonder that he looks so old. This last observation is considered as the greatest compliment.

Their amusements are of various kinds, but it is the custom to have certain special ones at stated times, and when they are over no one so much as alludes to what has gone by. From New Year's Day to the 'three kings' (Epiphany) everyone masquerades; crowds of young men and girls cover their faces with handkerchiefs, put on strange garbs, and go from house to house trying to mystify the inhabitants. After the 'three kings,' though the carnival is still in full force, no one ever thinks of dressing up any more. During this time the whole population drives about the villages in sleighs, slides down ice mountains, or storms snow-built fortresses. At Easter they put up swings in the public squares and private yards, which are invariably pulled down a week after. From this period till St. Peter's and St. Paul's day the young people amuse themselves on Sundays in various games and part-singing, which take place in the village streets. This terminates all out-door amusements, which reappear the next year in their proper sequence.

Children have their own games. Boys play the whole spring and summer till late in the autumn a game called 'babka,' a species of ninepins, but still more primitive, played with nine bones and a stone. Sometimes, however, children invent games for themselves, and these are generally interesting, as they then imitate with great accuracy local manners and customs.

Though wholly deficient in heart and that warmth of feeling so indispensable in home ties, the Siberian peasant is patriarchal in his family life; this, and his entire want of heart, are the outcome of local habits. Craftiness and chicanery being considered virtues, a complete absence of feeling is the result, and the close vicinity of migrating hordes living in an absolute state of nature has also an influence on him.

The master of the house is here truly the head of the family; everything depends on him, he is obeyed implicitly, and he on his part is just and considerate in his dealings; the farm labourers in his employ are not looked upon as hired servants but as members of the family, and no distinction is made between them and the children. The work is carried out in regular order, each one taking his turn of the lighter

and heavier labour, and the meals are taken in common, the family and servants eating at the same table.

There is a small school in every village, but the peasants do not willingly send their children there; this is not the result of any objection to enlightenment and civilization, nor owing to the loss of their services in the household work, but because they have an idea that the children learn nothing useful there. The bad method of teaching employed, and especially the very severe treatment practised by the schoolmasters, are great obstacles in the path of education. Siberian children are generally unusually well endowed by nature, and if they should chance to be taught at home by a gentle teacher they make rapid progress; but at school they are so systematically scolded and frightened that frequently after attending it for years they are hardly able to spell.

I visited one of these schools one day; a large, well-built house. I entered through the yard; on one side were large piles of cut wood, on the other farming utensils neatly arranged. In the enclosure fat cows were grazing with their little calves playing round them; through the open stable door I caught a glimpse of three fine

young horses, a newly-painted sledge was close by under a shed, as well as a spring cart. In fact, an air of peace and plenty was plainly discernible. The village schoolmaster is well paid and well kept, all his wants are supplied by the community.

I entered the house; all the ground-floor was occupied by the schoolmaster's family, the school proper being on the first-floor, On ascending the stairs I found myself in a large room filled with forms; at the further end was a large slate, in front of which stood a thin, sallow looking man; his aspect was forbidding; in one hand he held a piece of chalk, and in the other a cat-o'-nine-tails; on the benches sat five boys and one girl. Perceiving this very limited attendance, I imagined that the pupils had not all yet arrived. I afterwards found that for a long time past the number of scholars had been no greater. Occasionally indeed only two or three attended. Appearances are kept up; the school is there and children attend it; but, though supported by a population of perhaps six thousand inhabitants, the results are very meagre.

I will not enter into any details of the mode in which children are taught; the same

means are always employed, threats and ill-treatment. The schoolmaster, evidently displeased at my presence, tried to govern his temper; in spite of his efforts, however, the despot was so strong in him that it appeared in every word and action, so much that even the uninitiated might easily guess the usual course of the Siberian pedagogue. A certain incident confirmed me in my opinion. Each one of the children was called out in turn, and appeared before the black slate, pale and trembling with fear; they looked almost paralyzed and mumbled their lessons without taking their eyes off the instrument of torture in the master's hand; they resembled the clever dogs or monkeys who never lose sight of what is in store for them while performing their tricks.

Just then the door opened and admitted the village clergyman.

'Good health to you, Ivan. God be with you, children. I see all is going on well; the brats are learning, and you do not spare either time or trouble.'

'I certainly do not spare trouble,' answered the pedagogue, gloomily, with a side glance at the whip; 'but it requires patience more than

human to knock anything into the heads of these dunces.'

'With time and your well-known assiduity all will go well.'

'No, I spare no trouble, but sometimes I really begin to despair. This youngster, for instance,' he added, pointing to a boy standing in front of the slate, 'is so stupid that nothing can possibly be drummed into him. I have repeated his lesson to him five times and he does not know it yet. Have I not said it over five times?' he called out angrily, turning to the children. 'Answer, brats.'

'Five times,' mechanically mumbled the frightened little things.

'You see! Come, repeat it at once,' he shouted, giving a shove to the trembling boy.

'I—I——'

'Repeat it this moment,' he thundered.

The boy turned white with terror; he opened his mouth, but his lips refused to articulate a sound.

'He will repeat it,' I said, seeing the master raise his whip, and, without waiting for an answer, I made the little one sit beside me, stroked his head, and explained his task to him slowly

and clearly. The child, having recovered from his fright, listened with great attention, and, on being assured by me that no punishment awaited him, repeated his lesson perfectly.

The schoolmaster gave me a withering scowl, but dared not interfere and show his anger in the presence of the priest.

'That is all very well for once,' he muttered, 'but I would like to see some one else in my place.'

'It would be always well if kindness were used,' I answered.

This incident confirmed my previously formed idea that Siberians would willingly learn if knowledge were presented to them in a more attractive form, and the new generation frequenting such schools would then turn out really useful citizens. Their natural abilities are so good that even rudimentary knowledge would soon enlarge their thoughts, change the current of their ideas, and exercise a salutary influence on that greatest drawback to progress—the vice of drunkenness.

Marriages in Siberia are attended by all sorts of time-honoured ceremonies; we will pass over the preliminary forms of the betrothal, &c., which do not possess such peculiar character-

isties, and describe a few details attending the wedding itself. On the eve of the wedding-day there is generally a maiden party at the house of the bride; it is a farewell party given by the young girl entering conjugal life to her maiden friends.' To this ceremony the people invited are all the marriage officials, viz., the tysion-trzny, the boyar, the swat, all the bridesmaids, the parents of the bride and bridegroom, the unmarried girls of the village, and the high local authorities; the rest of the public, and more especially the young men, are impatiently waiting till the ceremony of putting on the Cap is over, and the time for dancing begins.

In an upper room a long table is spread, and at the top of it below the holy picture there is a large, raised seat, covered with carpets and destined for the young couple. As soon as all the guests are assembled, the ceremony begins by the putting on of the Cap; a large number of girls surround the bride, and, having relegated the bridegroom to the farthest part of the room, they proceed slowly to unplait her hair, singing the while a mournful ditty to which the bride answers in the same strain. The burden of these songs is the sorrow of the bridesmaids at the loss of their companion, and on the part

of the bride sorrow at abandoning a state she may never more regain.

The bridesmaids sing: 'You will never dance with us, nor play the gorylka,* nor throw garlands into the river, nor sit at the maidens' table.'

The bride repeats the refrain.

Then the bridesmaids sing again: 'They will tear the wreath from your head and wrap your hair in a kerchief, and when once the wreath falls no one can restore it again.'

The bride again repeats.

These songs last a long time, as the hair is unplaited very slowly, and in addition to the principal plait there are numerous smaller ones whose number answer to the number of bridesmaids; a lot of ribbons, strings of coral, &c., are entwined into these small plaits which the bride presents to her friends in memory of the day as the ceremony advances.

These proceedings would appear very poetical did not the real facts often belie them. It occasionally happens that, whilst the bride is bewailing the loss of her maiden wreath, a baby voice

* A game much played by girls in Siberia; it consists in two girls trying to hold each other's hands whilst running, while a third tries to prevent them from doing so.

makes itself heard, showing that all this is only an empty form covering the loss of virtue and morality.

At the conclusion of the ceremony of putting on the 'oczepiny' (cap), the young couple seat themselves in the place assigned to them, and the banquet commences; the part of host is filled by the chief wedding functionary, supported by the boyards. After their first hunger has been satisfied, the girls recommence singing, led by the principal bridesmaid, but this time their song is in praise of the chief guests. Greatness is never cheap in this world, so everyone thus honoured has to deposit a certain sum of money into the hand of one of the singers. The greater the gift the louder the praise of these Siberian maidens; they commence with the most important guests, and pass on till each one in succession has been duly honoured. Then the young men appear, followed by musicians, and general dancing ends the day's festivities.

The next day the wedding takes place, preceded by a solemn blessing. Previous to going to church, the bride and bridegroom throw themselves on the ground, sacred pictures and lighted candles are placed on their backs, and

they remain in that position until the persons whose duty it is pronounce certain time-honoured words over them. The curious part of this is that the blessing is not bestowed by the real parents, but by the 'wedding-mother' or father, who do not belong to the family, but have been chosen from among friends or neighbours to perform this ceremony. After the conclusion of the marriage-service, the remainder of the day is spent in singing, dancing, and drinking.

On the third and last day, only a few guests are assembled, consisting of the more important personages, the near relatives, and elders. The bride gives presents, generally linen pocket-handkerchiefs, and everyone is bound to give in return a present of at least twice or thrice the value, or an adequate sum of money.

To wind up the whole, they drink to excess and drive about the village making a great noise, singing, shouting, and ringing bells; there is no dancing, and the Siberian 'bull,' which occupied the young people for two days, no longer makes its appearance. I must explain what is meant by the Siberian 'bull.'

It is a well-known fact that the character of nations is reflected in their dances. The tender but systematic Germans have their valse;

in the monotonous motions of that dance one may perceive the pulsation of the Germanic race flowing on for ever like the current of an ancient river. The couples glide solemnly round the ball-room in even movement; each couple is all-in-all to each other, the woman leans on her partner, who upholds her tenderly, but without passion; it is Werther's love, deep, but not fiery, tender, but undemonstrative.

It is different with southern nations living under the rays of the almost tropical sun; the Italian tarantella and the Spanish bolero indicate, by their passionate gestures and the variety of their movements, feelings full of vitality. The talkative Frenchman has his quadrille, in the course of which there are so many opportunities for conversation and the exchange of wit. A native from the steppes of Ukraine stretches his sinewy limbs in the contortions of a cossack, as if he were practising mounting a wild steed. Lastly, we (Poles), with whom equality was the chief support of the Republic, have preserved this type in our dance, where, on changing partners in a polonaise, the last, if he so wills it, may become the first.

If, then, the dance paints so truly the national character, what must a Siberian dance be where

the sun sheds such feeble rays and the pent-up imagination has so little scope for freedom? The Siberian 'bull,' then, is nothing but the faithful representation of a Siberian's daily occupation, and a picture of his ordinary surroundings. Two people stand opposite to each other without regard to sex, as in these high latitudes there are no tender-hearted Werthers who would find a pleasure in sharing their enjoyments with a Charlotte; they stand and stamp their feet, as if to keep them warm, and then move about indiscriminately in all directions.

Having described the wedding festivities, I will now allude to the ceremonies attending funerals.

The habit of making a public display of grief which one does not feel, at the loss of a friend or relation, is also one of the conventional forms adopted to hide the natural want of feeling. When a man really suffers, he tries to hide his anguish in the inmost recesses of his heart, and if now and then a burst of grief finds utterance for a moment, it is invariably followed by a silent, aching pain. Here the father, mother, husband, wife, children, brothers or sisters, follow the coffin, and loudly proclaim their grief in improvised stanzas describing the virtues of the

deceased, and all the loss his death has occasioned them. Let us suppose, for instance, that the dead man was a young and healthy farm-labourer, his family following him to the grave would sing in monotonous tones something like the following:

'You are dead, Igorko; you have left me a soulless mother, and the farm without a labourer.'

'Who will till the land, cut the grass, and draw wood for the winter? No one can take your place, Igorko; you were always willing to work.'

'You are dead, Igorko; all the village girls are mourning for you, for you could sing the merriest song, and in dancing there was no one equal to you.'

'It will be lonely without you, Igorko. Who will help me to work now?—who will give me bread in my old age?—who will bury me when I am dead?'

'Nothing but poverty and want are left to me now.'

Sometimes, when the mother is rich, she hires women to sing the necessary songs, and can then devote herself in peace to funeral imbibings.

In this way wives mourn husbands and children fathers.

In examining Siberian customs, two features strike one—on the one hand unusual clear-sightedness and sound wisdom, on the other a complete absence of moral principles and of heart, and free scope given to every evil passion; the former are invaluable gifts of Nature, treasures which will in time bear rich fruit; the latter are inherited from their forefathers. Siberia has, nevertheless, a great and brilliant future in store; this country, now lying fallow, possesses undeveloped, unheard-of wealth of trade and commerce, giving promise of immense prosperity and advancement in the future. This promise will bear fruit when civilization shall have extended her iron arms and united these solitary polar regions with the rest of the world.

PART II.

SIBERIAN FAUNA.

CHAPTER I.

FUR-SUPPLYING ANIMALS.

THE impenetrable Siberian forests contain innumerable varieties of wild animals, who grow up, multiply, and die without having ever encountered their deadliest enemy. A very small portion, however, of these denizens of the woods, whether prompted by curiosity or hunger, now and then leave their lairs, and make their appearance on the confines of the steppes, and there become the prey of the fur-hunters. Their greatest enemies are the natives, as the European settlers are either too busy farming or too lazy, and only occasionally, and at stated times of the year, go out hunting. In fact, to make hunting in Siberia a regular pastime, one must possess not only a nature akin to the wild animals, but also the astuteness and woodcraft of

the American Mohican, and these qualities the primitive Mongolian tribes generally possess.

The settlers, though much altered by their residence, have yet retained some European characteristics. A Siberian peasant who goes out hunting in the intervals of his farming occupations does not do it out of love of sport, but from the hope of gain; starting without that zest which conquers all trouble and fatigue, he is easily discouraged by the increasing difficulties which beset him more and more the further he goes from the haunts of men. He allows his mind to dwell too often on the warm 'palata' and the mess of pottage which he has left behind, and so, having killed a chance bear, he returns home well pleased with his excursion. He is ignorant of real forest life, cannot crawl like a serpent through the grass till he arrives at the lair, is unable to watch for hours or days every motion of the approaching beast. He does not possess that instinct of a true child of Nature, which recognises at a glance unseen hiding-places in the earth or caves in the rock. True hunting flourishes only among the descendants of the primeval Siberian races.

These hunts are such that the boldest European feats cannot compare with them, for if

now and then among races enervated by ease and luxury we meet with such a man as Gerard, who forsook home and friends and waged war with lions and tigers amid the burning sands of Africa, in these snowy regions one may see legions of warriors going out to do battle with the denizens of the forest. In the south, hunting is a pastime, an amusement, one of the thousand ways of pleasantly killing time; in the north, it becomes a passion, a frenzy, the one aim and occupation in life from the cradle to the grave. There, a fortunate hunter is often actuated by desire for fame which is spread by the press from one end of Europe to the other; here, in Asia, multitudes encounter wild beasts solely from the love of fighting, knowing full well that, whether victorious or vanquished and slain, their fate will be as little known as is the whole life of these children of the desert.

In attempting to describe these contests, as well as the habits and means of existence of the animals which inhabit these almost unknown forests, the bear must first be noticed. Not only from his size, but also from his wonderful instinct and cunning, he occupies the most prominent place in Siberian fauna. The shaggy Lithuanian bear is known to us all, but the one

native to Siberia differs greatly from those which inhabit more temperate regions. They are of two kinds, the dark brown and the white, and this difference is due to the climate. The brown is found in the forests lying southward, while the white is only to be seen on the snow-clad expanse surrounding the pole. The former approaches more nearly the European species, though his coat is longer and darker, the head broader, and the whole body larger; the latter, excepting the characteristics common to the whole species, differs in size, colour, and habits from all other kinds. The brown bear abounds in all the forests of the Tobolsk, Tomsk, Yenisei, and Irkoutsk provinces, from the Ural to the confines of Kamtschatka. These animals are generally found in pairs, but occasionally they form packs, and are then most dangerous. They feed chiefly on wild honey, and lay up stores of this delicacy for the winter (a portion of which they spend in a dormant state), arranging it in symmetrical layers in their dens, inside the trunk of a fallen tree, or in a cleft of the rock. These stores are made use of till the beginning of December. During the greatest cold the bears become perfectly apathetic, and then

it is that the hunters can most easily capture them.

The Tunguz and Yakuts are the two primitive tribes which hunt the brown bear most constantly. Having lived a long time among the Tunguz, I have had the good fortune to witness some of these hunts. In winter they are not so full of interest, as they are then generally undertaken singly and do not present great danger. Their success depends chiefly on the cunning and sagacity of the hunter, who, having discovered the den, approaches cautiously, and with a well-aimed shot lays low his unsuspecting and unprepared foe. In summer these hunts become a kind of war, possessing all the excitement and danger of a real battle. All the males of a Tunguz settlement generally take part in such an expedition, excepting the old men and children, who remain to tend the cattle.

On the eve of a hunting expedition, all the members of it assemble at the Shaman's and witness all kinds of incantations, which are expected to bring good luck to the sport. The chief ceremony consists in blessing the lances. These weapons, used almost invariably by the Tunguz in bear-hunting, are made of a piece of

iron fixed on a stick four feet long.* Their skill in throwing this weapon, and the muscular strength of the arm, are so great that almost every throw is mortal. Previous to the blessing of the lances, all the members of the expedition stick their weapons point downwards into the earth so as to form a circle, inside which the Shaman walks muttering indistinctly.

When all is ready, the hunters proceed towards the forest, on the confines of which they encamp, and, having sent a few of the most experienced into the wood, await the result of their investigations for a day or two, sometimes even for a whole week. During this time they live on fish, or any game they may be fortunate enough to kill, while the exploring party rely for their subsistence solely on dry biscuits, which they provide themselves with before starting.

It sometimes happens that these pioneers meet an unusually large pack of wild animals, or forget for the moment to take the usual precautions, and are never seen again, having been strangled by bears, or torn to pieces by

* The Tunguz lance is similar to a very old weapon used in the 9th century by the Germanic tribes, and called Framen.

wolves. In such a case, after a certain time, new scouts are sent out in their place.

When positive information as to the whereabouts of the bears has been received in the camp, the hunters form a semi-circle, and, preceded by their guides, march into the forest. Firearms are very little used, but each man is provided with a lance, and a long, sharp knife.

On approaching the bears' den a fierce fight commences. The Siberian bear seldom runs away, but, rising on his hind legs, advances towards his enemy. The females defend their young desperately. Lances whistle through the air, knives despatch the fallen; but woe to him whose throw has missed its mark, or only slightly grazed, and thus irritated the already infuriated animal. If a friend be not at hand to lend ready aid, nothing can save the hunter from immediate death; he expires in the embrace of the hideous monster, who presses him to his breast, and crushes all his bones. This embrace is fatal; presence of mind, strength, and a steady aim alone ensure safety; in case of non-success, flight is impossible.

In encounters with the African lion, the disarmed hunter takes refuge behind prickly

bushes, whose thorns protect him for a time from the king of animals.* Meeting a pack of famished wolves, he has the chance of climbing a high tree, and thus saving his life; but no such device avails against the fury of this denizen of the Siberian forest. He penetrates the thorniest bush, climbs the loftiest trees, and can, wherever he may be, reach the foolhardy individual who has been imprudent enough to rouse him.

The Gilliacks, a tribe inhabiting the banks of the Amoor, worship these animals on account of their great strength.

The white bear inhabits the most northern parts of the Tobolsk, Yenisei, and Irkoutsk provinces. It is of colossal size, and is always seen singly or in pairs, never in packs. The inhabitants of the north consider this variety to be somewhat rare. This idea originates from the fact that they form their lairs in icebound deserts, inaccessible even to the Gilliacks, and make their appearance in inhabited regions only when in pursuit of prey.

---

* The lion is very susceptible to small injuries. The pricking of thorns is most painful to him, and there is no known example of his having broken through a hedge of thorns.

Only in the furthest point of the Yenisei province, beyond snow-covered fields, where no villages or human habitations exist, in the vicinity of the so-called town of Turukhansk,* are the first white bears occasionally seen. Still higher, nearer the pole, on the line of the Ockhotsk settlement, famous for its trade in fish and skins, and inhabited by the Ostiaks and the Samoiedes—the final point where man can still be found—these bears appear more frequently.

The sparse inhabitants of Turukhansk are mostly Russians, and are solely occupied in fishing. They do not hunt the white bear, and the apparition of one of these brutes is a signal for all precautions being taken, such as lighting fires, firing shots in the air, &c. Hunting this animal is only undertaken by the

* Turukhansk comprises four hundred inhabitants and forty-eight wooden houses, and is situated in latitude 65° 55′ and longitude 150° 15′. This place was chosen some years ago as the abode of the Skopt sect. These, however, have lately been transferred southward, especially in the Minusinsk province; and since that time one-third of the houses are empty. In spite, however, of such a small population, Turukhansk is of much value to the southern portion of its province, as it furnishes fish of all kinds, caught at the mouth of the Yenisei and in the Arctic Ocean.

Ostiaks and Samoiedes scattered along the shores of the Arctic Ocean. The sport generally takes place at night. Everyone knows that in these high latitudes the night lasts for long winter months at a time. Then it is that the Ostiaks, armed with powerful bows or strong clubs studded with nails, set out on these expeditions. Two or three, covered with furs from head to foot, proceed slowly along the snowy waste; the bright blue, yellow, and pink rays, appearing on the dark horizon like a gigantic firework, illuminate the scene. It is the Aurora Borealis, a light the splendour of which defies description. Every object then undergoes infinite changes of colour. The white expanse, the steep mountain peaks, even the bear sitting motionless on a huge block of ice, appear to be floating in blue ether, or gilded with a metallic sheen, or consumed by the purple flames of Erebus.

The appearance of the hunters, whose very faces are hidden beneath a mask of fur, resembles so closely that of the animal they are in pursuit of, that their prey is often deceived, and allows the Ostiaks to approach unmolested. The white bear usually sits on the top of an iceberg and watches his adversaries, uttering

from time to time a low growl. If by sight or smell he recognizes the presence of man beneath his disguise of fur, in a moment he glides down the smooth ice slope on his hind legs, and becomes the aggressor. The hunter's sole chance now lies in his club. He has no time to draw his bow, and knives are never used, as the blade is apt to freeze to the fur-coat. In the event of the man being able to get within shot of the bear, a well-aimed arrow lays the beast dead on the spot, and the huge white carcase slips down lifeless or writhing in its last convulsions.

Merchants connected with the fish trade, who have visited these parts, have tried the use of firearms, but experience has shown that bullets are often of no effect against the thick woolly hair of the beast, and that the sharp and often poisoned arrow is a more appropriate weapon.

The Siberian wolf surpasses in size its European relative; in the far north his coat is white, which gradually changes to grey or brown under the influence of a milder climate.

These animals usually wander about in packs; their habits are similar to those of the European species, and the difference in the colour of their fur is solely the effect of climate. Siberian

wolves very rarely attack man. Several times, when travelling in the Tobolsk province, I have seen packs of these animals running at a short distance from my sleigh, but, before I could seize my firearms, they were out of sight. This is of such frequent occurrence that an idea prevails that the Siberian wolf is more apathetic or cowardly than ours. But this is not the case. Their apparent timidity does not spring from fear, but simply from the abundance of food which they can at any time procure. Wolves are not aggressive animals, and hunger alone induces them to attack other animals, and even then man is their last resort.

In Siberia, where cattle are never locked up in sheds, but left out day and night in open pens, wolves can always secure a good meal of an ox, a sheep, or a horse, and have no need to encounter the danger of attacking a human being. In the northern parts, herds of reindeer in search of moss afford a ready prey. On the other hand, in the province of Yakutsk, where the population is exceedingly scanty, and therefore not affording such easy means of satisfying their hunger, they are much more ferocious and more dangerous to the unfrequent traveller.

Cases are even reported where whole families

have been devoured on the road to Yakutck. Neither abundance of arms nor personal courage are of any use in such a predicament, as the great preponderance of numbers always wins the day, and the packs sometimes amount to several hundred wolves.

The Yakuts, one of the primitive Asiatic races, who dwell on the banks of the Lena, surround their dwellings by various traps, in which the wolves are often caught. The object of these traps is not so much to obtain furs, of which they can always find an abundant supply, as the hope of frightening away these animals from the vicinity of their houses. It happens sometimes, however, that the wolves manage to escape the snares laid for them, penetrate into the interior of the aula, and snatch children out of the yourts, and even devour full-grown people. Such occurrences have given rise to miraculous legends related by the Yakuts, much resembling our own popular tradition of the wonderful 'man-wolf.'*

The yellow fox resembles in all respects the European fox, but there is another variety of this animal in Siberia, whose fur, on account of

* The author here alludes to a popular Polish fable.—TRANSLATOR.

its beauty and rarity, is almost worth its weight in gold—I mean the black, or so-called 'blue' fox. Many of our ladies (Polish) have admired this fur in shop-windows, and dreamt of possessing it as a part of their wedding outfit; but no one can form an adequate idea of the true beauty of this animal who has not seen him on the Siberian steppes. Truly, not even many Siberians can boast of having enjoyed the sight, as this creature is very scarce, very timid, and by far more wary and cunning than any other of his species. Once only have I seen a blue fox, at the foot of the Sayan mountains on the confines of Mongolia. He appeared at the entrance of a cave, standing on an eminence, not having seen me stretched on the grass beneath, and being unable, owing to the direction of the wind, to scent the vicinity of man. The last rays of the setting sun lighted up his dark form, to which it gave now a metallic, now a violet sheen; from the strong contrast of light and shade, it seemed as if the creature had a phosphoric light round every limb. I had no weapons except pistols, but at the first movement I made the vision vanished like dusky smoke dissipated by the wind, and, had it not been for the footprints which I discovered later

in the sand, the whole thing might have passed for a freak of the imagination.

No one specially hunts the black fox, as it is only by accident that he is met with, and his capture constitutes an era in the life of a Siberian. I have known hunters who devoted all their lives to the chase, and yet who have never even once seen a black fox. As the artist dreams of fame, the banker of successful speculations, the maiden of her lover, so the Siberian dreams of this wily animal. The possession of this rare fur, and its subsequent exchange for money, is ever present in his dreams.

A blue fox skin is often the making of a marriage or the end of a life-long friendship. In a word, it changes the whole course of a man's existence; but, as is often the case in this world, it is not always the first possessor who is most enriched. Its value rises as it passes from hand to hand, until at last it becomes the property of a great lady or a ballet-dancer, these being the persons who can most easily afford such a luxury.

I have heard a curious story of a fox's skin. The narrator, a Frenchman by birth, travelling on business in Siberia, had the gift of imparting his national wit and piquancy to the most

trifling anecdote. I do not vouch for the perfect authenticity of the following tale, but it seems to me to illustrate so vividly the wanderings of a commodity of commerce before it reaches its final possessor that I have thought it worth putting before my readers.

One fine morning one of the inhabitants of a small Siberian settlement was fortunate enough to kill a female blue fox. His delight was so intense that he took to drink, and drank so much and so fast that he soon died from the effects of constant intoxication. The man had spent his last penny in pandering to his vice, and there was no money left to pay for his funeral, so his sons were obliged to sell the precious skin to a neighbour, who had been eagerly looking out for this opportunity, and who paid only ten roubles (thirty shillings) for it. This neighbour was sly, but even he was outwitted by the local furrier, who managed to obtain the fur from him for twenty roubles. Just about this time a Jew was travelling that way, and Jews, as we all know, trade in anything and everything. This one, with the true instinct of his race, obtained the fur for fifty roubles, and took it with him to Krasudiarsk, where he disposed of it at once to a merchant

for seventy-five roubles. Soon after, the news that a blue fox fur was for sale reached the ears of a person of high standing, who (this happened in the days when officials were not very scrupulous) called on the merchant and carried away the fur; no sum was asked or paid, but the merchant shortly afterwards received the permanent contract for supplying government flour, which brought him large profit. How the skin left the hands of the official is an insoluble mystery; one thing only is known, that it changed owners frequently, till at last it was bought at Ockhotsk for five hundred silver roubles. All the inhabitants of Ockhotsk laughed at the unfortunate speculator. The fur was lying by without a buyer, and people shrugged their shoulders at the large sum that had been paid for it. The speculator answered not a word to the sarcasms of his friends; he used to air and fumigate it to keep out the moths, and wait.

Things were in this state, when a rich Englishman arrived at Ockhotsk in his yacht. The new-comer was of that class of John Bull who must see all that is to be seen, go everywhere, and buy everything. He had been in Egypt in search of the source of the Nile, which he had

not found; in Guiana, where he nearly died of yellow fever; in Central Africa, where he narrowly escaped being made a meal of by the inhabitants; in China, where, being taken for a missionary, he was nearly crucified; in a word, he had seen everything that is to be seen on this fragment of mud called earth—no, I am mistaken; he who had seen everything from the Cape of Good Hope to the Arctic Ocean, from Finisterre to the Celestial Empire, had never before seen a blue fox! The speculator asked a thousand roubles for the skin, which the Englishman paid without a word, and took the fur home with him to England.

The story goes that on his return home this inveterate traveller paid a round sum to a needy writer to describe his adventures, which were printed in the hero's name. In this book his hunt and capture of the blue fox played the principal part. These travels were translated into French, and appeared in the 'Revue Britannique,' adorned by many clever sketches, among others that of the blue fox hunt. In Leipsig a hunting-album was being printed, and this Siberian chase was not omitted. The Englishman became famous. Sic vos, non vobis!

Another animal, whose fur is highly prized, but who ranks much lower than the blue fox, is the sable. This creature is only found in the south-western part of Siberia, none are to be found in the north; it is an agile, timid little thing, and runs so fast on its short legs that there is considerable difficulty in catching it, the more so as in hunting it no weapons are used, on account of the damage they would inevitably do to the skin. Skill only is required.

Sables are caught in Yenisei, on the confines of Mongolia, beyond the lake of Baikal, also in central Siberia; but they chiefly abound in the lands situated on the banks of the Amoor.

Some years ago a good many needy merchants owed the first step towards their fortune entirely to sables, as before the annexation of the Amoor to the Russian Empire the native Gilliacks inhabiting those parts were unaware of the true value of the skins, and used to sell them to the Chinese for a mere song, sometimes for a handful of tobacco, or any small object of like value. After the annexation, a large number of Russian fur-merchants came and exchanged worthless trifles for these costly furs. I have known one who owes his present colossal fortune to one such journey. Now matters are altered,

as the Gilliacks have discovered the value of their wares; and though even now one can buy a skin there for eight or ten silver roubles, and sell it at the Niznii Novgorod fair for twenty-five or thirty, yet taking into account the expense and danger of such a journey, the gain is but a fair percentage, and does not enrich the merchant as rapidly as hitherto.

The Siberian squirrel, commonly called American, differs from the European species in the colour of its fur, and is only sought after on account of that difference. In summer the hair is of a dirty brown, and it has then no marketable value. In winter the back turns a beautiful grey, and the tail black. It lives exclusively on cedar cones, and for this reason the Siberian forests, in which these trees are plentiful, afford shelter to immense numbers of these little animals. When caught alive, this squirrel, like our own, is easily tamed; its winter fur costs from ten to twenty copecks (from fourpence to eightpence) in Siberia.

The ermine is a creature covered with snow-white fur, and, though possessed of no particular beauty, is much prized not only by the leaders of fashion, but has become one of the insignias of royalty, as a cloak lined with ermine has from

time immemorial formed part of the royal robes of state. The sewing together and matching the different pieces of ermine is one of the greatest difficulties of a furrier's trade; and for this reason these skins are always brought across the Ural in their natural state. Ermine are generally snared, and the traps laid for them much resemble the mouse-traps in common use in our dwellings. They are very fond of squeezing themselves into confined places, such as clefts in rocks, holes, &c., and on seeing the mouth of a trap they cannot resist the temptation of pushing themselves in, and when half in they cannot get out again. The hunter, as a rule, places from fifty to a hundred of such traps, and, hidden in the vicinity, watches the motions of his prey until he thinks the snares are full. The half-imprisoned animals make frantic efforts to disengage their heads from the wires, but to no purpose, and they soon find themselves snugly deposited in a large bag of strong linen prepared for the purpose. They are not easily tamed. I had a few of them once, and vainly tried every means in my power to conquer their wild propensities. When let out in the room, they invariably found some small crevice unnoticed by me and hid themselves therein.

After a series of fruitless experiments, I gave them back their freedom. It was a sight to see how quickly they scampered off, preferring the liberty of the steppes to a small, stuffy, Siberian room.

The Burunduk is the smallest fur-producing animal, measuring only from three to four inches in length. Its colour is brown, striped with white; it runs so fast that, when seen among roots of trees, it is impossible to distinguish its shape. It has a very shrill whistle which, unlike other animals, it does not make use of as a signal when in danger, but merely as a melody which it is fond of. When thus engaged, it is so taken up with its own music that it allows itself to be caught by the hand. The Siberians when hunting these animals do not take the trouble to lay snares, but kill them by one blow from a stick when whistling. The skins have scarcely any value when sold singly, but when sewn together a piece about a yard long and a yard and a half wide is worth from fifteen to twenty-seven roubles, on account of the great number of skins required and the difficulty of matching them.

Wild cats are sometimes met with in Southern Siberia, but their appearance is rare as they

prefer warmer climates. In shape they resemble the Chinese domestic cat, and their size sometimes reaches that of a fox; they live on sables, ermine, burunduk, and other small animals, and never attack man, whom they avoid, but when wounded they defend themselves valiantly. Their furs are worn by the middle-classes in China, and are not brought into Europe. During the summer heats these cats are often subject to hydrophobia. They then become most dangerous, not only to those travelling across the steppes, but even to the inhabitants of the neighbouring settlements. The effects are the more terrible as the Chinese, not knowing any means of curing it, put to death without mercy all who have been bitten, without even waiting for the symptoms of this terrible disease to show themselves. Rabid cats are never seen in Siberia, as they are only there for a short time and in very limited numbers.

Although in describing the Siberian fauna I pass over all those quadrupeds and birds which bring no profit to man, I must, nevertheless, make one exception and mention a small creature utterly unknown in Europe, whose fur is used by the primitive Asiatic races, especially the Yakuts and Buriatis, for trimming and

adorning their dress. This is a kind of bat called Letiaga; it has webbed wings furnished with claws like a bat, from which it differs in size and in the snowy white colour and downiness of its furs; it can also run along the ground with great rapidity. This tiny creature inhabits all parts of Siberia, except its most northern confines; it is the size of a water-hen, and is oftener about at night than in the day, though seldom to be met with even then. When hunted out of its hiding-place in the rocks, where it shelters itself from the rays of the sun, it runs very fast, tucking its wings under its belly; when hard pressed it rises in the air, and is then most difficult to shoot as it flies in zig-zags.

In addition to the animals already mentioned, there are found in Siberia badgers, otters, weazles, tumak martens, and pole-cats; the last are seldom hunted, as they live principally in the uninhabited parts of the Yakutck province.

CHAPTER II.

FOOD-SUPPLYING ANIMALS.

SO much for the animals who furnish us with clothing for a severe winter; as to those whose flesh is used for food, their number and variety are infinite. Innumerable white hares, white partridges, black grouse, woodcocks, wild geese and ducks, black cock, wild swan, snipe, &c., inhabit Siberian fields, forests, deserts, and steppes, and they may be snared with ease anywhere; if a gun is used, one shot will bring down several, the numbers being so great. The game obtained in winter is frozen, and in this state sent off to distant towns for sale. No one eats hare, the peasantry consider this animal as a species of dog, and therefore unfit for human food; its fur is of little or no value, and they

are therefore never hunted. Sometimes, however, they are trapped.

The nomadic races live chiefly on venison, reindeer, and different kinds of wild goat. Reindeer, though commonly called deer in Siberia, are of a species quite distinct from true deer. What the ox is to Central Europe and the camel to the Arabs, the reindeer is to the Ostiaks and Samoiedes, and other tribes inhabiting the northern frontiers of the world; it nourishes them with its milk, its flesh is their food, and its skin their clothing; harnessed to a sledge it drags surely and swiftly whole families within the Arctic circle from place to place.

Capable of enduring extreme cold, it exists in localities where the vegetable world shows but faint signs of life, man breathes with difficulty, and mercury freezes; it feeds on moss hidden deep beneath the snowy surface, and, giving everything, asks for no return.

The reindeer, as a domesticated animal united to man by a thousand different links, ought not to be included in this account of the inhabitants of the forest were it not that he is still sometimes to be found in his wild state; the number of these is very limited, and are accounted for by tame young ones going astray and being obliged

to shift for themselves. These wild reindeer are even more fleet than the domesticated ones, and attain to greater size. The deer proper is also to be found in the central part of the Yakutsk province. In the midst of the extensive forests inhabited by this creature, one often comes across patches of green turf growing on what was once the bed of a stream, and looking like streaks of light amid the eternal gloom; in these oases of the forest the deer love to congregate, here they find suitable nourishment and can give vent to their gambols without being entangled in the boughs, and here accordingly they usually shed their antlers.

The Yakuts, knowing this, carefully seek out these meadows in their excursions in the forests bordering the Lena, and are rewarded by large quantities of horns which they manufacture into utensils of various kinds, and which they even sometimes make use of in building their yourts. These spots surrounded by trees, called by the Yakuts Wa-halig (forest-oases) are so to speak the museums of the wilderness, as the deers collect in them all their treasures. In the mysterious African deserts, elephants seek out the most inaccessible spots in which to lay themselves down and die, as if anxious to escape the pro-

fanation of the presence of man; in the forests of Asia, deer choose the most secluded parts to lay down their magnificent head-gear. So, as Africa possesses a desert cemetery, Asia in like manner has a museum in the wilderness, though the latter, small and poor, cannot presume to compete with the former. In this case it is perhaps not so much instinct as a pure necessity which accumulates these hoards; still, happening in the two extremities of the world, the strange coincidence suggests similarity of habits in animals entirely different, and the unbridled rapacity of man who, in his character as lord of creation, seeks profit from them in life and death.

The elk has large, flat antlers, not unlike the fallow deer, and his coat is of a yellowish-grey; he inhabits all the wooded regions from the steppes of the Kirghiz to the Amoor; in the northern parts of Siberia he is not to be found. On the confines of China herds numbering fifty head may be seen; in the Yakutck province they are not so numerous.

The species called son elk is much larger than the ordinary elk; it has an enormous head and antlers resembling that of the stag, but they differ from the latter in that they are covered

with grey fur and from the tips a liquid matter is exuded. This animal sheds its horns in August and the new ones grow in March, with a new branch added yearly; the matter, of a red colour, which is formed between the bone and skin of the highest branches, possesses strong exciting properties, and for this reason elk horns are highly prized by the Chinese. It is well known that the Chinese are thoroughly enervated by a sensual life and the abuse of opium, and require on certain occasions artificial means of repairing the waste of vitality. Every father in the Celestial Empire presents his son with a pair of elk antlers on his wedding-day, and rich ones raise the number to a score or so, hence the price of a pair of antlers reaches seventy-five or even a hundred roubles. The flesh of the son elk is hard and flavourless, but the nostrils are considered as great a delicacy as the dromedary's hump or the bear's paws. Of all animals inhabiting Siberia, this huge creature furnishes the greatest scope for legends and wonderful stories; in the peasant's cottage, the yourt of the aborigine, the tent of the gipsy, round the bivouac fire of the migratory tribes, in short, wherever the ignorant populace dwells one hears fantastic stories in which the son elk

invariably plays an enchanted part. In the Obons (ancient cemeteries) he is believed to stalk majestically as the spirit of our ancestors; on dark nights he flits past haunted spots as the 'horus lykas,' or dark spirit. The Yakuts believe him to be a beneficent deity, the Tartars think him under the influence of the Shamans, and even the Buriati, a tribe little inclined to believe in anything outside the bounds of materialism, shake their heads and say that there is something mysterious and uncanny about him.

Some of the Russian writers suppose that the weird appearance of this species of elk is due to its unusual size, others affirm that the legends connected with him arise from the piercing, wild, and almost human look in his eyes. The most probable reason, however, is from the liquid contained in its antlers, the medicinal properties of which are unknown to the Siberians, and they consequently consider this an uncanny elixir used by the Chinese in some unholy, mysterious rites.

The roedeer is somewhat larger than the European kind, and seldom leaves its native forests. This animal is not afraid of man, and can be very easily captured. Its flesh, like that of almost all Siberian animals, falls far short

of European species, owing to the difference in climate, the eight months winter, the subsequent rapid growth of vegetation, and the scarcity of rain. All these have their effect on the grass and herbs, and consequently on the flesh of the animals who subsist on them. Although the vegetation of Asia differs from the European, the grasses in China are almost identical with those in Siberia, and yet the flesh of Chinese animals far excels that of Siberia. Siberian roes migrating in large herds from Yenisei to Mongolia, and killed there after a certain time, do not differ in flavour from Mongolian roes, so powerful is the effect of climate.

Having wandered to the southern confines of Siberia, let us glance at some of the animals inhabiting these parts. Along the Chinese frontier, in the wildest and most inaccessible places, where the Sayan mountains trace their rocky outlines against the azure sky, or the virgin Altai rears its snowy peaks above the clouds, are found various kinds of wild goats, which, like the iben of the Pyrenees, climb with facility the rocky walls, and, when hunted, astonish one by their bold leaps across the yawning chasms.

Amid the great variety of these animals, the

two which most deserve attention are the musk goat and the striped one called zymin.* The first is characterized by the little bags filled with fleshy matter which, when dried, gives out a strong odour of musk so highly valued by pharmaceutists. A few years ago, during some commercial transactions with the neighbouring tribes, I was able to acquire a large quantity of these musk bags, but, not having any means of communication out of Siberia, I was obliged to part with them much below the market value. The musk goat is in all other respects similar to the common goat, while the zymin is distinguished by a long silky coat of snowy whiteness, a long black line runs the whole length of its back, and the hair on its legs is darker than on any other part of the body, deepening in colour with the advancing age of the animal, so that at last its legs appear quite black.

The zymin is very scarce, but its hide, though much valued in Siberia, is seldom exported

* The Mongolian language is so poor that the name 'zymin' literally translated means goat, but Mongolians designate only the striped kind by that name. The Siberians have adopted the name, and likewise apply it only to that variety.

abroad on account of the great difficulty in cleaning and preparing it. All the wild goats in general, in addition to the rapidity of their movements, their agility, and the ease with which they walk along ledges of rock, are also endowed in a high degree with instinctive cautiousness. The localities which Nature has assigned as their dwelling place are so inaccessible that, except the immense eagle who oftentimes carries away in his mighty talons their young kids, they never see any other enemy; yet, in spite of this security, if a hunter should perceive one of them far away perched on the summit of a crag, even before he has time to seize his gun the apparition has vanished. The Siberians, when hunting these animals, have recourse to all manner of strategems in order to baffle this wonderful sagacity. Acquainted with the mysteries of the desert, and endowed with the cunning peculiar to the children of Nature, they usually succeed when the best European sportsman, after a day of fruitless wandering amid this labyrinth of mountain and ravine, returns home empty handed, or with the poor satisfaction of having gained a sight of this ghost-like creature, who,

like a spirit, is seen but for a moment, only to vanish into thin air.

While the southern parts of the Yenisei and Irkoutsk provinces abound in wild goats, the newly-annexed Amoor territory is the abode of an animal of great strength and ferocity—the Tur, a kind of wild ox, resembling in shape and horns a gigantic ox, and having a heavy mane on its neck. His gait is heavy and his movements ungainly, but he is, nevertheless, a most dangerous enemy. The Gilliacks make many expeditions against him, and frequently in these campaigns several of them pay for their temerity with their lives. In the adjoining Chinese provinces the hunting of these animals is undertaken by order of the local mandarin, and, accompanied by the ringing of bells and beating of tom-toms, assumes the character of a national festival. These sports remind one of the bull-fights in Spain, with this difference, that the scene is laid in boundless space, and that the whole public are his enemies. Alone against all, the Tur stands up to fight, he never turns tail, and charges the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire, endeavouring to butt through the living wall. He has a great dislike to gaudy colours, especially scarlet; should he see this

colour, he seems to be overcome with sudden madness, and, without waiting to be attacked, charges the unlucky person thus attired.

The north with its Arctic bears, the mountainous south with its numerous wild goats, the central forests with their thousands of deer, stags, roes, &c., the smaller animals and innumerable birds, afford an inexhaustible field for the naturalist. Living in almost uninhabited places, I have constantly watched with great interest the habits of the animals round me, and have tried to get a nearer view of them; but possessing only a limited knowledge of zoology, and without a single book of reference on the subject, I was unable to classify them in their proper places, or even sometimes to give them their scientific names. Though Nature is the great book of reference, and the base on which all human knowledge rests, and the richest field for the zoological inquirer, still, in the absence of acknowledged forms, divisions, and names, these studies can have but a limited relation to science, and the cursory view of the animals I have described may perhaps furnish material which in a humble fashion might assist more serious studies in this direction.

PART III.

ECONOMIC STUDIES.

RAILWAYS AND AGRICULTURE.

A GREAT deal has been lately written in Russian newspapers about a Siberian railway. Even before the question of its direction was settled, hot quarrels were engaged in on this subject, in which the newspapers were the arena, pens and ink the arms and ammunition. These quarrels now and then assumed a very warlike character. A merchant, for instance, would advocate the Tumensk or Irbitsk line, merely to have something to say, to show that he took an active interest in the encouragement of trade, and afterwards considered it his duty blindly to stick to his opinion, and would give way to most unreasonable anger if anyone should dare to put forward an opposite opinion in his presence. I have heard that at Perm this

gave rise to a very disagreeable state of things in the merchant's circle, and I, living in the Yenisei province, have repeatedly been present at very animated discussions as to the probable direction of the projected railway.

Now that the question has been finally decided on, it would be waste of time to consider which of the two projected lines would best have answered commercial purposes, more especially as there is much to be said on both sides, and the future alone can show from whence the greater advantage to all will spring. My object at present is to show all the benefits which will accrue to Siberia when one of these arteries of commerce shall unite the frozen north with more temperate parts. I feel all the more impelled to take up this subject, as what has hitherto been written on the benefits which would accrue to Siberian wildernesses from their connection with Europe does not throw sufficient light on the subject. It could scarcely be otherwise; Siberians do not favour printed discussions, and Russian economists and tradesmen know little or nothing about Siberia.

In trying to make known the benefits which await the country from the junction of east and

west, a writer generally dwells chiefly on its effect in developing the trade of Kiakhta, or on neutralising the monopoly of the East India Company by a strong competition, and, unacquainted with the internal life of Siberia, he only mentions casually those agencies which may in time tend to strengthen it, while he passes over in complete silence the moral and civilizing effects to be derived from it. Now that about which so much has been written and spoken is comparatively an elementary matter, and requires no discussion. Anyone with the least knowledge of business will readily understand that, when a line of rails is laid to the confines of the Celestial Empire, the export of tea by this direct and easy route will, by lowering the price, tend to undermine the English competition in German, and perhaps even in French, markets; the second-rate tea now offered would then soon be superseded by a choice article.

My object is to investigate the benefits likely to accrue to agriculture and trade internal and external, and further to show the effects, moral and material, arising therefrom. In order thoroughly to understand the first, we must go back and see what was the trade of Siberia in

olden times, and what inferences can be drawn from it.

Even before the annexation of Siberia, Russian commerce existed in these northern lands; it was the result of Tartar colonization, which endeavoured to introduce Islamism side by side with the barter of goods. Caravans circulated between Kashgar or Yarkand and the Irtish or the Lake of Yamysh, where fairs were held. Many Tartars settled in Siberia, and in their excursions into the interior of the country to Yamysh bought wares which they afterwards carried into the aboriginal yourts; some obtained cotton goods from Central Asia, which they subsequently bartered for the produce of the land; both the internal and external trade became centred in these tribes. After the Russian conquest, a war ensued between the two nationalities; on one hand Islam and commerce, on the other the sword and Christianity.

The Bucharchieks, dispersed amid the settlements of the northern inhabitants, had their rallying points, and monopolized the credit; the population of every aula trusted these traders, with whom they had constant relations. Such a state of things could not be pleasing to the local

authorities, and the officials, seeing in them the opponents of their interests, people who stripped the country of its best and most expensive furs, began from the first to curtail their sphere of action; but the Bucharchieks, having then in Siberia many coadjutors, were easily able to elude the law, and by well-managed smuggling continued their trade.

Such was the case when Russian colonization brought a new element into the contest; the crowd of settlers became anxious to get the markets into their own hands, but competition with the Bucharchieks was by no means easy. Chinese silks were sold cheaper than Russian prints.* The authorities took energetic steps to ensure a sale for Russian produce, forbade the export of furs to China, Turkestan, and Bokhara, put very heavy duty on silk stuffs, and organised a strict frontier surveillance; and thus the Bucharchieks, who up to the last had monopolized the cotton trade, found themselves unable to compete against Russian silks and linens. Not only did the transport through

* In these days Russian linen fetched one rouble twenty copecks per yard, and Chinese silks cost no more than thirty-nine copecks.

Kiakhta and Kashgar diminish, but Russian produce even reached as far as Mongolia and other provinces of the Celestial Empire.

At one time the Buchar element was so strong in Siberia that they were able to form a commercial company, and even had dreams of forming a separate Buchar colony, carrying on business in their own language. These hopes were encouraged by the Empress Catherine II., but in the commencement of the present century the government, seeing in them a handful of unduly privileged aliens who paid no taxes, rented government lands, furnished no recruits, and had the privilege of changing their allegiance to a neighbouring country, and moved by the constant complaints of the Russian merchants whose trade suffered in consequence, withdrew, by the act of 1834, the privileges formerly granted to the Bucharchieks. From that time this people, trammelled by unfavourable laws, receded further and further northwards, splitting up into small families, and, intermarrying with the aboriginal tribes, were absorbed into the various settlements scattered over the steppes, without leaving a trace of its previous existence. From this time also dates

the commencement of commerce between Europe and Siberia, small, it is true, and slow of development on account of the great distances, the barrier of the Urals, and heavy custom duties. Hopes were entertained that in time this would develop into a source of riches and prosperity for the country, but years went by, and commerce still remained in embryo.

Seeing such a state of things, the government availed itself of every possible means of developing the commerce of its Asiatic provinces, but these efforts have produced scarcely any result; those who wrote about Siberia knew her not, and political economists seeing two great barriers in the way of internal development, viz., a sparse population and the unwillingness of the primitive tribes to adopt civilized habits, advised a direct method of overcoming these hindrances without reflecting that these very obstacles were but the outcome of a greater evil, the lack of means of communication, and that in seeking to overcome them it was absolutely necessary to reach the origin. In order to increase the population, the government sent out annually sixty thousand convicts to Siberia, but after fifty years of this course the

number of inhabitants had barely increased by a few hundreds of thousands; then efforts were made to attract the natives to civilization through the clergy, but these being themselves but little civilized rather repelled them, and widened the gulf between the Siberians and Europeans; no other result could have been expected, such an evil must be attacked at its very source.

Through want of communications commerce remained in its infancy, notwithstanding that the privileges of the Bucharchieks have been abolished, and the influence of merchants, engineers, and other professional people failed to arouse it from its lethargy; agriculture remained undeveloped, and the people sent in by Russia, dispersed through the endless expanse of the steppes, seemed to melt away, whilst the aborigines, scared by the new elements, receded further and further northwards without receiving any impression from contact with the new-comers.

The greater part of Siberia is covered by wild, impenetrable forests, quite inaccessible to those unaccustomed to them. These primeval forests, traversed here and there by rapid rivers,

form an almost impassable barrier between Siberia and other countries, and the attempts at colonization follow many small tracks, which, after penetrating some way into the wilderness, come to an end in a little village, beyond which there is no road of any kind. These forests so effectually bar all communication between the villages that the inhabitants are obliged to make long detours to reach each other—for example, in going from Kouznetska to Minusinsk one must go three degrees north and back again. In the same way Narrym is separated from Tara, Tara from Tomsk, Minusinsk from Nynn Udinsk, &c. Such difficulties effectually impede all commerce, cramp the free development of thought, interfere with social organization, and tend to the multiplication of dialects; culture does not advance, having no help from outside, the severity of the climate is not tempered by European improvements, and the prices of all goods are raised owing to the almost impossibility of exchanging them for the natural productions of the country.*

* The low price of corn in Minusinsk does not tend to lower its price in the neighbouring province of Kouznetska.

Those who are unacquainted with Siberia might say that in default of commerce, which cannot be properly developed through lack of communications, they can always fall back on agriculture; but even agriculture is affected by the vast distances. It is true that rural occupations constitute in a measure the foundation of the social state, but they should be considered only as a point of departure towards a further development of the masses.

In Europe, agriculture without commerce has no importance; in the middle ages the agriculturists were always the lowest and least civilized class of the community. In China to this day the class which tills the soil is uneducated, and therefore has no standing in the social scale. This class of labour divorced from trade is but a mechanical drudgery, requiring neither thought nor education, and does not tend to develop man's natural capacities. Such work, in which the intellect plays no part, is in our day but a middle-step between barbarism and civilization. In virgin lands, such as Siberia, agriculture contributes towards progress, as it is infinitely easier for the nomads to become tillers of the soil than tradesmen. Nature herself teaches them this

metaphorphosis. A Buriati, in his migrations, finds hoards of berries collected by mice; a North American Indian, going on a hunting expedition, satisfies his hunger with wild grain of various kinds; another, noting the unflagging industry of the ants, strives to imitate their efforts. In such wise, examples from Nature gradually convert the hunter or fisherman into an agriculturist.

Man, after having passed through many trials and encountered endless difficulties, begins to learn that tilling the soil alone without intelligence is nothing more than a game of hazard. The card thrown on the green table and the seed scattered abroad are both dependant on many attendant circumstances—frost, rain, hail, and sudden atmospheric changes ruin the hopes of the agriculturist, as those of the gambler are dissipated by the uncompromising cards of the banquier. To overcome this evil he seeks safety in commerce, not factories and partnerships only, but everything possible is tried to counteract the force of circumstances.

In Siberia the want of communication precludes such progress, however much its inhabitants might desire it. The peasant left to

himself is never certain of the future; in case of fire, plague among his cattle, or hail storms, he has nothing to fall back on, besides which the climate of these northern lands is much more difficult to deal with than our own temperate European clime; sudden changes from frost to heat are frequent and unforeseen; the locust is a perennial plague, ravaging the crops. And, should some such misfortune overtake a village, the inhabitants can look for no succour near, the surrounding steppes drown their cries for help.

The inadequate number of 'hands,' aggravated by want of regular communication, is the cause of such slow development of agriculture. The existing post-road leading to Irkoutsk can but give an idea of what the result of a line of railway passing these localities might be. The villages and settlements in the vicinity of this road are richer and more thickly populated than those situated further away; one sees more land brought under cultivation, hay-making, &c., on the steppes, whereas to the right or left of this great artery agricultural life dwindles away, and finally vanishes completely amid the boundless desert. Months are

required to traverse this road from west to east, and the many bends it takes lengthens it still more. A railway, changing months into days, days into hours, and pursuing a direct course, will unite the scattered parts, and afford the means of combined action between the west and east. Small tracks which now scarcely extend over a few hundred versts will develop into post-roads; fed by the great central route, they will shoot out as far as the migratory hordes of Yakuts, Buriatis, Tunguzes, and Ostiaks. And these will either approach involuntarily the places inhabited by Europeans, or, retreating further and further, will amalgamate together.

Under such circumstances, the change from a fishing and hunting life into an agricultural one will be insensibly effected, and the present tillers of the soil will become artizans, &c., by the influence of western civilization.

Having said so much as to the gradual development of agriculture forming the chief basis of the future prosperity of these parts, commerce must also be mentioned as a great stimulus connected with it. The rich raw material of Siberia, such as coal, iron, &c.,

and the great wealth of the mineral and vegetable kingdoms, remain as yet almost untouched, as the transport westwards is surrounded by almost insurmountable difficulties; their development is also stopped by the impossibility of getting out the necessary machinery and skilled labour. In facilitating the communication between Europe and Asia, not only will the raw material find ready sale in the different markets of the Russian Empire, but they can also be worked on the spot. Smelting works will spring up near the iron mines; the large forests will promote the manufacture of glass; the salt lakes will be utilized, and the present high price of salt be lowered; the breeding of sheep, now very limited on account of the small demand for wool, notwithstanding the quality and abundance of pasture on the steppes, will be encouraged by the establishment of woollen and cloth manufactories.

In speaking of these things the object is not to show the profits which would naturally spring from the future extension of commerce, as such a result speaks for itself, and requires no arguments, but to point out the moral and civilizing effect which would be produced.

The population of Siberia, with the exception of Russian officials and tradesmen, is composed almost exclusively of peasants and the primitive tribes. In civilizing Siberia it is indispensable to act directly on the agriculturists, and they, their social position being improved, will in time exercise an influence for good on the aborigines. The schools will remain empty, a limitation in the number of taverns will not diminish drunkenness without a spur to urge the masses forward on the road to progress.

In Russia this stimulus is found in the emancipation of the serfs; in Siberia, where serfdom never existed, the peasant, seeing around him nothing to show him the advantages arising from improvements, remains wedded to the old routine, and never emerges from the circumscribed circle of his primitive ideas. He is attached to his time-honoured superstitions; believing that his whole well-being is dependent on a lucky chance or a meteorological manifestation to him supernatural; uncouth and coarse, having no field for the enlargement of his mind beyond a mechanical labour which he shares with his domestic animals.

On the other hand, the sight of rising manu-

factories and a palpable improvement in the life of those who know how to substitute machinery for manual labour,* who to bodily work add that of the mind, will act upon his antiquated ideas and help him on the road to improvement. Good communications, the first lever of commerce, will react gradually on the civilization and morals of the inhabitants; should any doubts be entertained as to the probability of these results, serious consideration must soon convince us that these predictions are not mere suppositions, but capable of almost mathematical demonstration.

The votaries of political economy have ever been divided into two camps, Liberal and Protectionist; the latter affirm that free-trade promotes competition, which in its turn often provokes warfare, and at one blow destroys the efforts of years towards internal improvements and the development of commerce; the traders, on the other hand, maintain that competition alone can promote trade, and that wars

* The introduction of machinery can in no respect lessen the value of manual labour in a country so sparsely populated, nor would that suffer even were the population increased fourfold.

will cease when a common benefit shall have bound different interests into one perfect whole. Louis Blanc, in his ideas of a universal brotherhood more poetical than practical, draws the picture of free-trade in the following words?

'Let us for a moment imagine that peace has at last begun to reign on earth, eternal peace, lasting and undisturbed, that hatred is dead, and war has become impossible, that nations unite in one great family, sharing amongst themselves the produce of their several lands. Such an exchange increases the value of work in changing cause into effect, and ensures universal peace; as soon as such principles come into operation, the problem of peace will find itself solved. Have not coffee, wine, tea, vanilla, &c., each its own country? Why, then, strive to produce an artificial climate to suit them, while beyond the area of custom duties, Nature herself provides us with a superior quality, and therefore free-trade is one of the blessings of the universal brotherhood.'

Notwithstanding that Louis Blanc, in viewing the nineteenth century with the eyes of futurity and by idealizing economical questions, brings

them within limits more esthetical than practical, it must be conceded that there is some truth in his views. By what means can these obstacles be overcome? The government cannot by a stroke of the pen overturn the established rules of internal trade,—as such a course would be adverse to some of the interests of the country; but these rules are gradually vanishing, as nations are more and more drawn together, and the chief means of effecting this is to be found in the establishment of railways.

In these late days we have seen great changes in the Custom-House duties, and more especially in those places where a network of railways has united the interests of the different seats of commerce, increased competition has brought a reduction in the export duties; increased facilities of communication is therefore indispensable to free-trading. To Siberia, so far removed from the centre of civilization, it has become a vital question.

I have endeavoured to point out that the morality and civilization of Siberia do not depend upon administrative measures, but upon the development of agriculture, and that agri-

culture will for ever remain in its primitive state if commerce does not step in; and finally, this latter will never succeed, unless it be aided by a railway uniting the most remote districts of the steppes; to carry it only as far as Turukhansk affects seriously and injuriously Siberia and the Ural-Altai arteries, but the deeper the line extends into this country, so rich in natural productions which now lie fallow, the greater the profits which will arise from it.

PART IV.

STUDIES OF HABITS AND CUSTOMS.

CHAPTER I.

THE FORTRESS OF SNOW.

MY first impressions of the northern locality to which my fate had sent me were anything but flattering. The end of my journey was a small village, or rather settlement, consisting of some seven or eight huts half-buried underground; its name was Yamka.

This village, lost amid the endless steppes, possessed no means of communication with the rest of the world. It lay on the snowy expanse like an atom thrown into space by a freak of fate. My sleigh stopped, a few peasants appeared in front of their dwelling, several old women and children soon joined them, and they all surrounded us with evident curiosity. This was the entire population of the place.

One of the peasants, stepping forward, announced that he was the Soltys (chief personage)

of the village, and that on that score he was bound to provide me with a lodging; so he invited me to his house. I went in. In one room, which served for a kitchen as well, I found seven children, their mother, and a strapping girl of Mongolian lineaments. The next room contained a store of provisions, agricultural and household utensils; in one corner were some barrels of sauerkraut, while the other was occupied by a new-born calf. The peasant explained that the first room was occupied by himself and his family, the second was the spare room or guest chamber; and he therefore placed this, the best part of his house, at my disposal.

'You will not find so good a lodging in the whole village,' he added; 'all the other cottages have but one room in which the people live together. The calf may worry you at first, but you will very soon get used to it.'

My things were brought in, a bundle of straw thrown down for a bed, and I found myself at the end of my long journey, which had extended over five thousand miles, in a country where I was perhaps destined to end my days. My illusions were destroyed. I sat down on the straw and thought. What my meditations were I am unable to say. It was a kind of apathy

and indifference to all my surroundings. The extent of my misery seemed to have deadened my senses, the atmosphere of the chamber was nauseating, the smell of the rotting cabbage well-nigh unbearable. I heeded not the noise of the children, neither did I see the gaping peasants who had come to inspect the new guest, and were plying me with questions.

My eyes rested mechanically upon my bundles, these constituted all my past; the present and the future seemed so terrible that I dared not even look around me. I felt thoroughly worn out, tired, unhinged, and hungry, yet I seemed unable either to rest, eat, or think. I wished for nothing, nothing appeared to interest me.

Several days passed in this state, which bordered on mental death. I ate what was put before me without noticing its taste, I slept without undressing, I sat still without either thought or feeling. Such a state must have led to a complete disorganisation of my mental powers had I not made an effort to shake it off. A few days later my landlord told me that the time had elapsed in which he was bound to give me shelter, and advised me to look out for a lodging.

'You can,' he said, 'hire another room somewhere else, or remain here, as you wish; but, I feel bound to tell you, you will nowhere meet with so comfortable an accommodation as we have given you.'

And he spoke truly; having gone round the eight huts which composed the settlement, I found the cottage I was in a palace compared with the others. Each of the so-called houses had but one room, doing duty for kitchen, bed-room, and store-room. Everywhere, owing to the scanty accommodation and badly-managed stoves, the smells were unbearable. I chose the least evil and decided to remain where I was; I made an agreement as to the price of board and lodging, and I was even fortunate enough to get the calf removed (by paying well for it, of course); but in spite of large offers I could not get the barrels of cabbage taken away, nor the assurance that no one would enter my abode without my leave.

'I have no place where I could put the cabbage in,' said my landlord; 'were I to trust it to a neighbour half would be stolen, and, as to forbidding my guests to enter a room intended expressly for their occupation, that I could never do. Where would I see my friends or

exercise the duties of my office, were I to give up the only suitable place? and, besides, you will feel much happier seeing human faces than sitting all day long by yourself.'

One cannot fight against impossibilities. I had to agree to all these conditions, and from that time my days passed changelessly on, and each was a torture. I do not speak of the physical part, oh, no! only happy people can feel physical discomforts, it affects not the unhappy. In spite of the food being more than unpalatable, in spite of the noise of the children in the next room breaking my rest, in spite of the vermin which assailed me unmercifully, I would have felt comparatively happy could I have purchased by these ills one short moment of solitude. No one living in happiness and plenty can form an idea of the boon that solitude would have been to a man situated as I was—solitude in which I could re-trace the past or create a few moments of illusion. I had it not.

From morning to night I found myself in the midst of uneducated people, to whose questions I was expected to reply, of drunkards who filled the air with their coarse songs or fell over me. From morning to night dirty children

crawled under my feet, while the elder ones annoyed me with their practical jokes; even at night I had no peace from these small tormentors, who ill-treated me for want of something better to do. Escape from them was out of the question. One night, when one of the children emptied a bucket of iced-water over me while I slept, I lost patience, and gave the offender a good beating; his cries soon brought the mother with broom in hand and oaths on lip, and I do not know how the affair would have ended had not the father interfered.

'You should not beat a child,' moralized mine host, 'for these children are not yours. Is it to be wondered that a child likes to play? It is but a child. Besides, it is in its own house, and you are but a stranger. I know you pay for this room, but I told you plainly you were not to consider it exclusively your own.'

No one could answer such logic. I had but to try to bear my lot in silence. I very soon discovered that drunkenness was the only occupation and joy of the people. On account of the climate, agriculture occupies the peasant only during the summer months; he then works incessantly, and, having brought in the yearly

stores, he has comparatively nothing to do the whole winter long, and he generally has his labourers to help him. From time to time a servant girl or farm labourer would drive a cart to a forest distant about ten miles and bring back wood. On Saturdays the landlady would make a large pot of soup out of the frozen meat, potatoes, and cabbage, and that mess was warmed up day after day and served us for the whole week. This was my only food. It is difficult to form an idea how disgusting this mess became, especially towards the end of the week when it was spoilt and smelling; but it seemed to be relished by my neighbours, their palates, burned by alcohol, having lost all power of taste. In the country round there was neither well, nor river, nor even a stream; the water used in cooking was taken out of a muddy marsh. This water, when used for drinking, was disgusting, and there was nothing else to take but kwas (to which I have not yet become accustomed) to quench one's thirst, as on account of the cattle-plague the year before the very existence of milk seemed forgotten.

My host, both on account of his social position and his post, was the chief personage in the settlement. He was the judge who decided

all disputes, punishing the offenders and making-up quarrels. He was of tall stature, and with rather regular features, a keen, cunning expression and red hair. The dignity of his post prevented his giving himself up as wholly to drink as did his neighbours, but he had the knack of being able to tipple continually and of getting muddled without being absolutely drunk.*

My host, wiser than his neighbours, ruled them, but his wife, wiser than he, ruled him. Such are the ways of the world, even in this tiny settlement in the midst of the steppes.

Tatiana Waselevna was not a woman for nothing, and took her place as the wife of the Soltys seriously. This old hag, yellow of complexion, with sharp nose, slightly-closed lips, and deep-set, small grey eyes, possessed rare rapacity and cunning, and exercised these amiable qualities upon everything she came across, managing to gain material benefits whenever it was humanly possible to do so. Did a quarrel

* I feel bound to add that this dreadful habit has been much lessened in villages situated nearer the high-roads; it is only in such out-of-the-way places as the one I am describing that it has been allowed to develop itself to such an alarming extent.

arise, did a peasant beat another, before the affair came before her husband she had already managed to obtain substantial presents from both parties; did a theft come to light, the culprit had to bribe her well. Even in her everyday intercourse with her neighbours she lied and promised so much that all of them felt bound to bring her something, such as a hen, some eggs, or a bushel of potatoes.

She talked incessantly, and the sound of her voice from morn till night was like the clapper of a mill; in time I became accustomed to it as the miller to the noise of the mill. She talked about herself, about the greatness of her power, and the wisdom of her arrangements, and of the respect everyone paid her. This incessant talk was in reality harmless, as it concentrated itself upon one point and was often but a repetition of the same phrases; but woe to the individual who happened to incur her displeasure, or who had the audacity to express an opinion! Her yellow face reddened, the point of her nose deepened, the thin lips contracted, the grey eyes gleamed, and a flow of fearful oaths poured out of her mouth and assailed the unlucky offender. When she was in this state, everyone in the hut trembled before her; the children hid

behind the stove, the servant girl shook as in a fever-fit, and the husband, if possible, left the house. Often the fit did not end in words, but the broom or whip were put into requisition. At such times I had a very picture of hell before my eyes; shrieks, sobs, curses, and blows, all mingled together formed a chaos difficult to describe.

This woman, so quarrelsome and despotic, had but one point of sympathy with her husband, and that point was myself; upon this one subject husband and wife agreed perfectly. I was not only to them an object of gain, a person to be sucked dry, but also the victim of all their ill-temper and despotism. I was scarcely allowed to open my lips; the least demand upon my part was received with recriminations. I paid a high price, and yet was fed upon stinking soup and potatoes; when I even asked to have my food fresh, or begged permission to boil up the samowar, the landlady's horror was worth witnessing.

'Look at him, how delicate and grand he is. My husband, the Soltys, and his wife can eat what he cannot. He will next expect tea three times a day, or perhaps will wish me to send ten versts off for wood!'

If I observed that I did not expect any kindness, but only wished to have what I was paying for, the fury of my landlady knew no bounds.

'Money! did anyone ever hear of such a thing? For his paltry money he wishes to be kept like a gentleman! You seem to forget, my friend, who you are, and what your situation is in these parts.'

Her servant, taken as a child from one of the aboriginal hordes, had become quite imbecile from the treatment she had received. She was a colossal machine, never speaking a word, going about her work mechanically, laughing in an idiotic manner when her mistress laughed, and trembling when the landlady's voice was raised. She got drunk whenever she had the opportunity, and snored frightfully afterwards. Such were the people I had to live with!

I used to escape whenever possible from the tongue of the mother, the cries of the children, and the smell, which gave me a headache, and walk out. But then there was nothing to be done, and nothing to see but a few scattered huts upon the snowy expanse, with paths trodden down from one dwelling to another, and a few sleigh tracks made by the labourers going

to fetch wood or water. That was all!

The innate want felt by every man for association with his kind made me enter some of these huts. Everywhere the same sight met my eyes. Half-naked children and the forbidding countenances of the elders did not tempt me to desire a closer acquaintance. And besides, what could I speak to them about? They live in a half-savage state in this desert, and have not the slightest knowledge. All exiles sent to their country are looked upon by them as thieves; they do not comprehend political crimes. They experience no repulsion to criminals, and a murderer is even respected as a man of energy, but a man who has not previously been put to hard labour is universally looked upon with contempt as an artist who has failed in his trade.

In our settlement there were two other exiles besides myself, who, having committed murder, had worked their time at hard labour and were now sent as settlers for life. These men were much thought of, chiefly on account of the terror they inspired. The Soltys himself addressed them with a certain consideration, and his wife moderated her voice in their presence. They came to see me one day, which was thought a

great condescension on their part by the inhabitants. During their visit (which I afterwards found had a second motive) they vaunted themselves upon their murders, and related with pride all their bloody deeds. Reason plainly bade me hide the horror I felt of them, as to offend them would have been equivalent to bringing an untimely end upon myself.

The situation was a difficult one. Alone amid these people, without the hope of ever being able to quit them, I sighed for solitude as the only solace in my sufferings. But where could I find it? A separate room was nowhere to be procured, and, had I even been able to secure one, could I have freed myself from such visits without incurring the vengeance of these dangerous men? Living alone in a hut all to myself threatened probable loss of life, to which even the most unfortunate cling.

I tried to think, but could not arrive at any determination. In the meanwhile, my host and his worthy wife began to interfere with all my actions. On pretence of taking care of me, they advised me not to move a step outside the hut, and they gave me to understand that I should not enter into conversation with anyone; if I happened to address anyone in their

presence, even were it a child, that person was carefully catechised as to my questions and the answers I had received.

All sorts of most extraordinary tales were circulated about me, and my landlady generally ended her discussions in this manner:

'Whatever he has been guilty of is not our affair. But he is a proud creature; he does not profess sufficient respect for us, he will not drink whisky like the rest, he is different from everyone, and he must be taken down a peg or two.'

And then followed sarcasms directed against those who, remembering what they had once been, seemed to forget their present situation, who had now no social position, and whom it was easy to put in arrest for the merest trifle. All this was said generally, but the darts were too well pointed for me not to see towards whom they were directed. Often the hag in addressing me made use of the word baryn (sir), and it is impossible to describe the bitter irony and anger she put in her voice when pronouncing it. I pretended I did not understand it, and kept silence. These tactics soon brought the expected results. My landlady, seeing that all her shafts fell harmlessly against the buckler of

my indifference, ceased, grinding her teeth with rage, and I gained a few days of peace. I soon, however, found out that it was but a short armistice, during which the enemy was on the look-out for a new means of attack.

The plan she hit upon was very simple. Hitherto my landlord and his wife had made of me a mental prisoner, now they elected to turn me into a domestic servant. And the opportunity soon presented itself for putting this plan into execution. It was just about the hour when the family was in the habit of taking tea, and I usually heated my samovar at the same time. It happened that there was no available wood, except a few large piles lying out in the yard; the labourer was away upon an errand, and the children were loudly vociferating for their supper.

The landlady handed me a hatchet, saying, in a tone of command,

'Go and chop some wood for the fire.

Though during the last three weeks (the time I had spent in this wilderness) I had experienced all kinds of persecution, yet such a request had never before been addressed to me. It was evidently a trial to see how far my humility would reach.

'I am not your servant,' I answered, coldly.

'You are not our servant, but you share our morsel of bread, you should therefore do as others do and not be a lazy good-for-nothing.'

'I pay ten times the value of the miserable food I get, and will have nothing to do with your work.'

'Anyone who is admitted into the family should not differ from the rest and should help when he is wanted; the labourer is away.'

'What is that to me? I do not belong to your family, and the fact of my lodging in this house is not sufficient to make me feel myself bound to perform any of its domestic duties.'

'This is not a case of duty, but of politeness.'

It was evident that the hag wanted to make me once perform some manual labour for her, so that, having broken the ice, she might in the future employ me *ad libitum*, were it only for the pleasure of humiliating me. I am of opinion that everyone should try to adapt himself to whatever state he is placed in. Manual labour does not dishonour anyone, and with a different set of people—people possessing heart and kindliness—I would willingly have taken my share of the daily toil, joined in their work, and become one of themselves. But here matters

were widely different; here was a wish to wound, ill-will, and hatred.

'If it is a case of politeness, then, I decline to be polite.'

'You refuse! Who is, then, to chop the wood? Perhaps you expect me to do it—me the wife of the Soltys, or my husband himself? If there is no wood chopped, there will be no tea.'

'Very well; we will do without the tea,' I quietly answered.

My impassability stirred her bile. This answer was like a spark thrown upon the accumulated materials of hatred and malice. She shook, and, rising suddenly, cried out, in a hoarse, savage voice,

'Turn neck-and-crop out of my house. I will not harbour such a man, who does nothing, says nothing, but sits mutely down, who is not fit either for a song, or a glass, or a friendly lark.'

'Very well,' I said, getting up, 'I will go and live with one of your neighbours; there are plenty of people who will be glad of the sight of my money.'

I was fully aware that the accommodation I should obtain at the other hovels would be

infinitely worse; here I had a room where now and then I obtained a few moments to myself, whereas I could not hope for even that much in any other hut; but I also knew that the threat of turning me out was a slip of the tongue, as both the man and his wife were too much alive to the main chance to allow such a good bargain to slip through their fingers. This surmise turned into a certainty, when I perceived a puzzled expression on my landlady's face, her anger being for the moment overpowered by the fear that I might really take her at her word. I felt like a general who sees that his enemy has approached too near, and does not know how to retreat from so dangerous a position. I had no desire to take up my abode in one of the other hovels; I should be exposed to the same discomforts, and, when removed from the protection of the Soltys, my very life might be in jeopardy; but, profiting by my last strategical move, I did not show my tactics.

Without another word, I began to collect my property. The old woman was standing in the middle of the room, looking on with terror at these preparations; at last she said, in a smothered voice,

'What are you doing?'

'I am packing up, as you see.'

'Why?'

'I am going to live elsewhere.'

'There is no hurry; you will not be as comfortable anywhere else.'

'It is you who are turning me out.'

'I spoke hastily; why do you take up things so quickly?'

'It cannot be helped, what is said is said; besides, I am sick of this continual quarrelling and nagging, and perhaps elsewhere I shall have more peace.'

Her husband, coming in just then, was surprised to see the preparations for my departure, and, on learning the cause, joined his wife in advising me to remain where I was.

I pretended to yield to their expostulations, and remained. Although from that time they evinced more respect for me, and even my landlady tried to govern her temper, the change was but on the surface in reality; I felt that I was in an atmosphere of cunning, malice, and bad faith. The people surrounding me were obnoxious to me; the very sight of them filled me with disgust—there were no hearts in their bosoms, in their natures not the slightest idea of justice. I had not the smallest corner I could

call my own, and no hiding-place except my travelling-bag. Tea and sugar evaporated before my very eyes, and I knew that, when my meagre store was exhausted, I could not replenish it.

I left the cottage sometimes and walked along the endless sheet of snow on which were perched the eight hovels dignified by the name of village. I used to walk on knee-deep in snow and sit down upon a snow-drift, overcome by fatigue, until the sharp cold forced me to retrace my steps homewards. These walks had neither object nor pleasure. I went out because I wanted change, and longed to free myself for a moment from the surroundings that were constantly before me.

I soon had to forego even that small pleasure. I had noticed for some time that the two criminals I have mentioned would leave their house every time I left mine. Sometimes they would come up to me and offer a friendly glass, but oftener they would dodge my steps from afar, exchanging meaning looks. I pretended not to notice them, but made up my mind to be vigilant.

Among the children of my landlord was a boy of thirteen. It is difficult to imagine a

more repulsive creature—red-haired, squinting, with a monkey's face and a flattened nose. He was as wicked as he was ugly, and was the terror of not only all the other children, but of his own family. Tormenting and persecuting those weaker than himself constituted his only amusement. When he could not find a human victim he revenged himself upon the domestic animals. He feared his mother a little, and he hated me from the time I gave him the thrashing for sousing me with cold water.

I discovered that the two criminals had frequent interviews with this boy. It happened one evening that as I was lying on my bundle of straw, unable to sleep on account of the sad thoughts which beset me, I fancied I heard a slight tap at the window. The red-haired boy, who had been sitting beside the stove, quietly left his place, and, throwing a glance at my motionless form, stole out of the room on tiptoe. I jumped up and followed him. The night was dark, but in spite of the darkness I distinguished three forms disappearing into the only public-house the place boasted of. I put my pistols into my pocket, and with many precautions approached the window of the public-house. I saw the two criminals and the boy seated at a

table, each with a glass of whisky before him; besides the publican, a notorious thief and drunkard, there was nobody in the room. I could not hear all that was said, but, from the words that reached me, I was not at a loss to understand the gist of their conversation.

'Are you sure you have seen?' asked one of the men.

'Perfectly; blue, red, and green paper money. I am sure there were about fifty notes.'

'That would make about a hundred roubles of silver, and perhaps more!' added the second.

'Does he not leave them at home?'

'No, he always carries them about on his person.'

A gust of wind and snow prevented my hearing the next few sentences. After a few minutes the following incoherent words reached me.

'Pistols loaded—a solitary walk—he drinks no whisky—bury in the snow—you will receive five roubles.'

This was quite enough. I returned home unobserved, with the full determination not to budge a step beyond the threshold. Had I entertained the smallest doubt, the fawnings of the red-haired monster and his entreaties that

I should take a walk would have made me quite certain of the fact.

My situation was by no means an exceptional one. Murders are matters of almost daily occurrence in Siberia. The liberated convicts, aided by the uncivilized drunken population, often kill for the sake of obtaining the smallest trifle: perhaps one rouble, or a pair of boots, or a cap. Nothing stops them from committing murder; neither the qualms of conscience, which they never experience, nor the fear of punishment, which does not reach them; as if ever a crime becomes known, if in spite of distance and bad communications legal proceedings are taken, and the criminals sentenced to hard labour, they are able to escape during their transportation, and, having changed their clothes and name, contrive to be taken up for pauperism, and are sent to settle in another part of the country.*

Time dragged itself along with frightful monotony. I never left the house, never spoke to anyone, and only ate when pressed by hunger. I had no books, and could not write

* This state of things has been much altered; criminal convicts are sent to settlement in Saghalein Island, from whence escape is almost impossible.

without exciting suspicion. Daylight in these parts was very brief; at three in the afternoon it was quite dark, candles were unknown and it was impossible to buy them. For an hour or two I had the light of the wood fire, but this flickering flame soon went out, and at five o'clock the family retired for the night, leaving me alone in the dark with my thoughts.

I wished to keep the fire in a little longer, but even that I was forbidden to do, being told that I should not be different from others, and ought to go to bed when the others did; that keeping up a fire might bring on a conflagration, and, finally, that I had no right to waste wood when I never went to the forest to cut it and had declined to chop it.

I was unable to go to sleep before ten or eleven o'clock. I therefore remained in darkness for about six hours. The silence that reigned was fearful, it was like the silence of the grave, with the difference that, unlike the grave, it brought no forgetfulness with it. I made my bad health an excuse for refusing the frequent invitations to drink, and opposed the silence of contempt to the cutting speeches levelled at me; but the continual quarrels, shouts, and drunken brawls that surrounded me

told on my health and jarred my nervous system. I really did not know which was harder to bear, the silence and darkness of the evening or the orgies of the day. In daylight, amid shouts, cries, and fighting, I sighed for the evening, and when it came and the darkness enveloped me, I longed for daylight when I could hear the sound of a human voice. The only respite I had were the few hours of troubled, feverish sleep, during which I was unconscious of my sorrows.

Almost every man, however unfortunate his lot, has a friend to whom he is able to open his heart and find sympathy and advice. I had not that comfort; I stood alone, worse than alone, for the people around me inspired only contempt and well-founded distrust.

I had, however, one great consolation: this was religion; one great friend, in my own thoughts. Religion gave me strength and hope, and I turned my thoughts towards finding some means of freeing myself from this intolerable situation. After ruminating for a long time I formed a plan, the execution of which put new energy into my wearied mind. I came to the determination of freeing myself from the thraldom of my landlord without exposing

myself to certain death. Not only did I not divulge my plans, but I tried to avoid suspicion in every possible way. Experience had taught me to be as secret and cunning as the people I had to deal with.

One day I heard one of the peasants tell the Soltys that, having married his daughter, he intended shutting up his cottage for a time and going to live with his son.

'Could you let me hire your house?' I asked.

'What for?' promptly put in my host. 'You could not live all by yourself without endangering your life.'

'I am not going to leave even were there no danger, I am too comfortable to think of a change.'

Unwillingly I said this so ironically that, had not my landlord been under the influence of drink, he must have understood me. Luckily for me he guessed nothing.

'Why, then, do you want to hire this cottage?'

'There are a great many wolves around, often of an evening I hear them howl; I wish to kill a few and make myself a winter cloak of their skins. It is both too cold and dangerous to hunt

them out of doors, so I intend to surround the cottage with a rampart of snow and fire at the wolves from behind it.'

'That is quite another thing; if you give me five roubles, I will undertake to make your rampart for you.'

The hope of gain quite blinded him. The owner of the cottage, delighted at the thought of letting his house, made no difficulty.

The very next day my landlord and a few others set to work to fortify my dwelling, never dreaming that he was working against himself. Everyone seemed satisfied. My host because he was earning five roubles at a very easy rate. The owner because he was letting a house which otherwise would have brought him in nothing. The two criminals fancied that my hunting expeditions would at last give them the long waited for opportunity of executing their plans with regard to me. The red-haired boy began to hope that the promised reward would not long be delayed. I was pleased because I knew I was taking them all in.

The work which I personally superintended advanced rapidly. Heaps of snow sixteen feet high surrounded the hut and yard. These ramparts were thick and sharply finished at the

top, they were soused with water till there was a layer of ice a foot thick upon them. In that climate water freezes instantly; the snow wall, therefore, became as hard as a rock, and so high and slippery that it was a greater protection than the pallisades and fosses of a fortress.

During its construction, I was fortunate enough to purchase an iron gate. This door was low and thick and closed with an enormous key; it looked like the entrance to a vault. How the man who sold it became the possessor of such a strange article I did not consider it necessary to ask, but I had a strong suspicion that it must have been stolen from a graveyard. As this kind of trading is openly practised in those parts, however, I could not afford to be particular.

A large aperture was choped out in the ice wall, two strong piles driven in, and the door fixed to them. I also had a little window made higher up and embrasures here and there.

While my host and his friends were busy preparing this would-be hunting-trap, I on my part was making good use of my time. From one peasant I bought the frozen carcase of an ox, from another a frozen pig, from a third a

large quantity of potatoes, carrots, flour, and other victuals, and, profiting by the opportunity when my landlord was busy in the discharge of his duties as a judge, I had all these provisions carried into the empty cottage. At the same time, and by paying double for it, I got enough wood transported into my fortress to last me for the whole winter, as well as anything else I could pick up that I thought might be useful. I had to make these purchases without bargaining for them, as I could not afford to lose time, and the haste I made was so great that the Soltys had not yet finished his business when all was ready. I then had my trunks carried over.

'What are you doing?' asked my host, when he saw my goods leaving his house.

'As you see, I am going to try my new house,' I replied, going away rapidly.

'What house?' he mumbled, in a drunken voice, 'it is no house, but a wolf-trap.'

'Help! Murder!' shrieked out the landlady.

But it was too late; the trunks were inside, I hastily paid the man who had carried them, and, stepping inside, locked myself in. When my landlord and his wife arrived they found an impassable obstacle. I got upon a ladder, and

looking at them over the wall I quietly asked them what they wanted.

The situation was somewhat dramatic. In the heart of the desert, in the midst of a cut-throat population, I was alone against all my persecutors, but I breathed freely as I knew now they could not harm me.

'What do we want,' shouted the man. 'I wish to know what you mean by cheating us with tales of wolf-hunts, and getting away from my house in this manner.'

'What right had you?' shrieked the wife, gnashing her teeth and showing her fists, 'to delude this fool of a husband of mine to such a degree that he helped you with his own hands to build your hiding-place.'

'You'll rue it,' muttered the crestfallen Soltys.

'I will have the police. I will have you judged and severely punished,' groaned the hag.

All this noise soon brought the whole population to the spot. Drunken men, screaming women, and ragged children were all clamouring outside the iron doors. I saw the two criminals and my red-haired friend amongst them. When the noise had somewhat abated I answered,

'You ask me what right I had to leave your house, the right every man has of seeking a more convenient dwelling. I paid you beforehand and the time is not yet up, so I am at liberty to leave if I choose. I did not let you know that I was going to leave, as you are greedy and would have put every possible obstacle in my way when you found that I was not going to be cheated any longer. You undertook to build this wall for five roubles, and I have paid you that sum before witnesses. I owe nothing to anyone and I require nothing but to be left in peace.'

'Why do you wish to separate yourself from the rest?' asked some one.

'Are you any better than we are?' said another.

'We shan't allow it.'

'There is a law . . . . . .

Here I lost patience.

'I separated myself from you because you are all drunkards, cheats, and thieves, and for such people I feel nothing but aversion and disgust; I shut myself up here to escape from your temper, old woman, from your drunken brawls, my neighbours, from your murderous knives, dear friends. You are naturally angry

that you cannot cheat me and that I have cheated you instead, but your anger touches me no longer. I will let no one in, and my ice wall will keep you all out; you can complain as much as you like. I will welcome the interference of the police, which can only be for my advantage.'

There was a moment of silence. Presently my landlady called out, joyfully,

'You will not remain there long, we will see to it.' And turning round, she said to the multitude, 'I forbid any of you to bring him food.'

'You wish to starve me out? That would be a very good idea, only, unfortunately, you have thought of it too late. I am provided.'

The men from whom I had bought my provisions explained my words.

The fury of the baffled woman knew no bounds, and showed itself in curses and shrieks; she swore at me, at the peasants, and her unhappy husband became the scapegoat and had to pay for everyone. I did not wait for the end of the tragedy, but, retiring from my post of observation, I entered my hard-won dwelling.

Lighting a fire, I began unpacking and preparing my dinner. Many who have never felt

the thorns of life would have considered my position as the height of my misfortune. I accepted it as a heavenly protection, and, falling on my knees, thanked God for having rescued me from the dangers that had threatened me upon all sides. Man requires society, longs for communion with his species; enforced solitude is usually hard to bear, but here things were different, here separation was necessary, and was absolutely the only means of getting out of an unbearable situation. In the chequered path of my existence, I had never before experienced anything like what I had to endure in these wild steppes.

Until then I had always lived amid people with Christian ideas, who, in fulfilling their own duties, had endeavoured to soften my sad lot; the smallest word, a kind look were all-in-all to one who, having lost everything, clung to the smallest straw that kept him from doubt and despair. Here there was nothing of the kind; instead of human beings was a herd of savages without heart, without feeling, without even pity, having of humanity nothing but the outward semblance.

Anyone who has realized the misery I had been in, can easily imagine the joy I felt on

freeing myself from such hateful associations and the danger that had been hanging over me, for I instinctively felt that sooner or later the two criminals or some of the other inhabitants of the village would attempt to murder me. Death had no horror for me; on the contrary, there were moments when I longed for a speedy ending to my sorrows, but to see, as it were, the sword of Damocles hanging by a thread over one's head ready to fall at any moment was torture hard to bear. I felt rejoiced when I reflected that I had been able to escape by my own strength, in spite of everyone, from the house of the Soltys and the society of his neighbours. Oh! there was much to rejoice at, much to thank God for.

I made my new house as comfortable as circumstances would allow, and, remembering that I had but myself to look to for everything, I arranged my every-day duties systematically. Lighting the fire and cooking my food took all morning; after dinner I rested awhile, and in the evening I chopped wood for the morrow's consumption, and thawed water for the tea and household purposes. I did all this cheerfully as the work was undertaken by free will and not by orders from another. My relaxations con-

sisted of a few books and a pack of cards. Anxious to prolong my mental food as long as possible, I determined not to read more than five pages daily; I read slowly, weighing every word, analysing every sentence and comparing it with my own thoughts, and thus a few pages took up sometimes several hours. I came to the conclusion that a good work so read brings a true and lasting benefit to the reader. The pack of cards was an inexhaustible treasure. I laid down all the games of patience I knew, and invented others. After play came prayers.

It is only the unfortunate and forsaken who really know what balm faith pours into the human heart. It strengthens the soul which otherwise would give way under the burden laid upon it; it gives that greatest of blessings, hope; and it teaches how one should bear adversity without a murmur, and with trust in Providence. A faithless man is doubly unhappy, first from this misfortune, secondly by the drying-up of all springs of love in his heart. Prayer flowing straight from the soul is a species of conversation with one's Maker. At such times I did not feel alone. I was conscious of the mysterious, impalpable presence of God around me. I thanked Him for every

good thought, and I came to look upon my former tribulations as a necessary trial sent to perfect me and cure me of my sins.

I learnt some hymns by heart. Their simplicity charmed me as I did not live in an ideal world, but had to accustom my soul to hard, every-day reality.

I was alone; no prying eyes watched my proceedings, no impertinent questions were asked, no dangerous traps were laid. And I thanked God for my solitude. Days passed without bringing any change in the round of my life. A fortnight had elapsed since I voluntarily separated myself from the rest of mankind, and I not only did not regret the action, but I even slowly became accustomed to my solitary lot. The stores of provisions were sufficient to last for a long time, a continual frost keeps meat fresh, but unluckily I was not as well off in every way; the small amount of tobacco I had been able to procure made me very careful of that luxury, therefore it was but seldom that I allowed myself the enjoyment of a pipe. Now and then I climbed to the little window in the ice wall. What was the sight that there met my eyes? A snow-covered steppe, eight hovels, and the ear assailed by the drunken cries of

the men who inhabited them. Far better this omnia mea, this half-buried hovel, this tiny yard and these thick, impassable walls dividing me from the world at large.

Sometimes when I look at these tall, sharply-pointed ramparts a horrible thought strikes me. I dread the spring.

The spring, beneath whose balmy breath everything revives and rejoices, in which Nature, dressed in its new garments, shines with happiness and beauty, in which every living being, drawing its clear ether, raises a thankful voice to the Creator: to me alone in the whole world brought the reverse of these feelings.

For I think that the rays of sunshine, carrying heat and happiness to others, will melt the protecting wall and make me once more the prey of my lawless neighbours.

I try as much as possible to divert my thoughts from this dreadful fact, to keep up my energy, and fight on with adversity. Spring is far-off yet, winter lasts long in these Arctic regions, and in that time much may happen. I hope God, who remembers the smallest of his creatures, who stretches His saving hand over all His works, will not forget me,

Strengthening my soul by faith in an omni-

potent Providence, I turned to my avocations, which daily occupied me with mechanical precision. They were necessities, and as such I did not wish to evade them. So I worked on in the sweat of my brow and found a solace in them and a means of escape from the melancholy thoughts which otherwise would have assailed me, and led me to doubt and despair.

Another week passed. The stillness that reigned all day was interrupted at night by a strange kind of music. It was a serenade which the inhabitants of the steppes gave me. I mean the famished wolves. I loved music, but somehow this concert failed to satisfy me; this constant, melancholy, monotonous howling at night had a most depressing effect.

My unstrung imagination pictured my hut as a great grave, and the howling as a funeral dirge. Vainly did I try to escape from these hallucinations, vainly I tried to rise above these torturing visions, the infernal music, acting upon an unstrung, nervous system, plunged me into the bitterest musings. Solitude, the boon of those who fly to it to think over happy reminiscenes, can only be bearable for the unhappy when they are strong enough to withstand the unhealthy whispers of despair which rise

louder and louder the greater the efforts made to subdue them.

In about a fortnight these periodical howlings became unbearable to me. Driven out of all patience, I one evening took up my gun and sallied out to fight my tormentors. Nearing my ramparts I looked through one of the long, narrow holes, left open in them. My eyes, dazzled by the light I had left, could distinguish nothing at first. Gradually, however, I saw large, white forms moving slowly over the snowy plain. There were about sixty of them, some walked slowly about sniffing the ground, others squatted on their hind legs and were howling most dismally; all were well-grown, of a whitey-grey colour, with eyes that shone like burning coals. I put my gun through the aperture and aimed at the nearest, the shot went off, the animal gave a bound in the air, and rolled over in the last convulsions.

In a moment the howlings ceased, and the astonished animals seemed to try to discover the cause of such a sudden aggression. This silence lasted but a short time. Suddenly the whole herd rushed at the ice wall, but in vain; their claws could not pierce the hard, smooth surface. Brought to the highest pitch of fury

by this check, the maddened animals endeavoured to leap over the wall, but it was too high and their greatest bounds were unavailing. I fired again. When the smoke cleared away I saw one of the largest wolves dragging himself painfully away on three legs, while he filled the air with his cries; his companions becoming aware of danger, and having realised that vengeance was unattainable, quickly abandoned the spot.

I tried to discover some means of possessing myself of the bodies of my fallen foes, as the second wolf had died by this time, but it was too difficult. I could go outside my fortress for a few minutes and drag their bodies in, that would have been easy enough, but I perceived the forms of other wolves prowling about at the distance of about two shots, who were evidently waiting to see me appear. Had I left my hiding place these creatures would have rushed upon me, and devoured me to a certainty. And my wish to possess myself of the furs was not sufficiently strong to make me run such a risk. Knowing that they never go about in daylight, I determined to await the morrow before securing my prizes, and I retired to rest.

Next morning I got up with dawn, but who

can describe my astonishment when, on looking through the embrasures, I saw no vestige of the two animals I had killed, and, had it not been for the traces of blood upon the snow, I might have thought that the whole affair was but the outcome of my imagination. I at first conjectured that perhaps the living wolves had dragged away with them their dead comrades; but I soon became convinced that their disappearance was owing to quite another reason. Traces of human footsteps imprinted upon the snow showed that my neighbours, having heard the shots and guessed their cause, had appropriated my trophies!

Sic vos non vobis.—Such is the way of the world.

A few days after the events I have just narrated, an extraordinary event happened to me, the possibility of which I had never anticipated. A guest came to me suddenly! Readers, do you fully realise the meaning of that single word? How many hopes, conjectures, and speculations it contains! A guest in this desert was an occurrence as much at variance with the usual ways of my life that I feel bound to explain it fully. The thing happened thus.

My landlord, furious that I had outwitted

him and incited by his wife, had made a complaint against me to the administrative government. What the tenor of this complaint was can be easily guessed: he tried to put my actions in the most unfavourable light, and hinted that I intended to escape. The administrative government, on receiving such a document, could do no less than send a clerk to find out the particulars. This clerk, arriving in his official capacity, was the unforeseen guest I have mentioned. Finding out, through the aperture in the ice wall, who the personage was, I allowed him to enter my fortress, closing the iron doors in the face of the Soltys who was trying to force an entrance.

In a few words I acquainted the new-comer with the whole situation, without omitting all the tortures I had undergone while under the roof of the Soltys, or the dangers that threatened my life at the hands of the two criminals. I pointed out that the law allowed exiles to live as they liked best, either with the people of the place or by themselves, and, finally, that my wilful solitude could in no possible way be construed into an attempt to escape.

The clerk agreed to the justice of my remarks, and, pleased with the money I thought fit to

bestow upon him, reprimanded the Soltys smartly and promised to have him punished for representing the case in a false light. He also advised me to write a complaint upon my own account, begging at the same time to be transferred to a more convenient locality. As a rule I do not like begging or complaining, but the hope of freeing myself from an unbearable situation made me write, but in quite another spirit. I did not complain of my lot, I did not beg to be transferred, but I requested in the name of the law, which is bound to watch over the life of every man, for a guard to protect me from the impending danger. This report, worded in strong language, I handed to the clerk, who undertook to forward it on.

Man is a sociable being. One would imagine that in these steppes, among half-savage people with no idea of social duties, whose feelings, crystalized by the polar snows, could not expand themselves, solitude would be preferable; and yet such was not the case. Nature will assert herself; man pines for man, and friendly intercourse, however mediocre, cheers him, as then he no longer feels alone in the world. I alone had wished for solitude, and when I had obtained it I was satisfied. If now and then a

longing came into my heart, it was never a wish to return into the midst of the people I had freed myself from. Yet it was not from misanthropy towards the world at large, but the intense disgust which my late surroundings had inspired. The sight of a man who did not belong to the horde I had left, though he was rough and uneducated, filled me with joy.

I drank in the sound of his voice, I treasured every word which fell from his lips, and tried to attune my soul to the thoughts and ideas of my guest; and though the voice was hoarse, the ideas inartistic and backward, yet I saw it not. This bloated, coarse face, red nose, and big, silly mouth appeared to me pleasant and sympathetic; the clumsy movements had grace in my eyes, and even the frequent oaths with which he embellished his conversation had a rough and honest humour for me.

On thinking, later on, about the feelings of pleasure that the sight of this man had produced in me, I understood how young men, living for some time amid lower associations, lose gradually all characteristics of good breeding and worldly polish. Solitude is so fearful, the necessity of intercourse so absolute, that not having any choice in one's surroundings

and associates, and lowering oneself to their level, insensibly ends in becoming one of them. Impressed by these reflections, I endeavoured to retain my guest as long as possible, but his duties would not allow him to tarry. He went, and the solitude to which I had before become accustomed became still less bearable, the silence that surrounded me was like that of the grave. I felt a sadness I had never before experienced, a hopelessness I had not hitherto known.

I went back to my usual avocations, but nothing seemed to go as well as formerly. The remembrance of the gruff voice of the clerk which had resounded in my hut for a few hours brought memories of the people I had left, and stirred thoughts long dormant in my heart. I went back to the past so full of disenchantments and sufferings, but in which I had at least acted and lived. My youth, my literary struggles, my journeys in distant lands, the deaths of dear ones, and the cruel blows of misfortune,—I saw them all. A few moments of happiness, together with long years of misery, hopes and fears, sorrows with their delusive imaginings, and, finally, this long strife with the fate which had persecuted me—all this, mingled in a chaos, passed before my

imagination, the smallest details of my life stood out in bold relief, forming, as it were, a painful prologue to a fearful epilogue. I felt all so distinctly that I could almost imagine that the visions were palpable.

Two angelic forms—my mother and wife—God had taken to Himself. Now these times are past, and remain only as painful reminiscences, but then with what happiness would I have exchanged my life for one of acute suffering, could I only have lived, acted, and felt as others.

Perhaps among the indifferent throng would have been found one being to pity me. To find sympathy is a balm to an unhealable wound; it heals it not, but it lessens the suffering. Here no one listens to the cry, no one sees the despair or guesses the torture, if illness comes there is none to help, and death can advance unchecked.

Sometimes I thought of Dumas' fantastic tale of 'Monte-Cristo.' The situation of Danton locked up in the Château d'If was in some ways like mine, yet this man with nothing around him but four naked walls managed to pierce through that granite grave and find a friend. A friend! how sweet the sound of that word.

But could I follow his example? Beyond my walls of ice there was the world—there were even no one forbade me to join them, and yet I could not leave my prison.

I had to submit to fate. To shake myself free from such dangerous thoughts, I had recourse to manual labour as the only means of stilling my sick imagination. Taking up my hatchet I commenced chopping wood. I chopped furiously, the pieces flew in all directions, and the noise filled the stillness around me. My strength was giving way, perspiration poured down my brow, yet I chopped on with a savage energy, with madness, forgetful of all around me; at last the hatchet slipped out of my hand, and I sank senseless upon the ground.

I know not how long I remained thus. When I regained consciousness, the sun was high in the horizon; I felt feverish and had a severe headache; I wished to rise but could not, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I managed to crawl to my couch.

My illness developed itself rapidly. The thought came to me that a time might come when I should be unable to move from my bed, so I dragged near to me a bucket of water and

a few loaves of bread. Thus I secured myself from death by starvation.

Help I could not expect from anywhere. Had I even been well enough to apprise the villagers of my state, I would not have done so. Seeing my helpless condition they would have consummated their designs upon me! To die by the knife or to be starved to death! two extremities!

But even choice was denied me. Voice had failed me, and, even had I by summoning up all my remaining strength been able to give a cry no one would have heard me.

Thoughts sped on by fever thronged my brain during this illness, the length of which it is impossible for me to determine; a thousand different hallucinations passed before my weary eyes. In this chaos two distinct fears assailed me. One was the thought of my beloved children left orphans, and the other the idea of dying without religious consolation.

I had no help—it is impossible to fight against fate—and awaiting death I prayed earnestly to God. And God had pity upon me. After a long time, during which I remained powerless and unconscious, hovering between life and death, I felt health returning. This re-

action manifested itself by a very strong feeling of hunger. During my short periods of consciousness I had nourished myself only with bread and water. I now thought of procuring some more substantial food. I tried to rise, but found it impossible.

People surrounded by the luxuries of life can be ill in peace, as they are always certain of having some one near who will attend to their wants. Anyone so forsaken as I was cannot prolong his sickness, he must rise in spite of will or wish, and necessity endues with artificial strength where natural has faded.

Not being strong enough to rise, I crawled to the fireplace; there I found some of my stores, a little wood, and a bucketful of water. With great pain and labour I managed to obtain warm food.

Having satisfied my hunger I felt stronger, new courage animated my heart, and falling down on my knees I thanked God for having saved me. From that time each succeeding day brought me new strength, convalescence that passing from sickness to health was unknown to me, fight for subsistence superseded it.

And perhaps it was better so. If necessity

stood at the bedside of all those who have endured illness, there would not be that long list of suffering ones who prolong their illness by weakness born of inaction. In a few days I recovered completely, but having lost all count of time I was unable to know the days of the week. And the days flowed on with the old monotony. Soon, however, kind fate sent me a companion in the shape of a little black dog, who one day, trying to escape the ill-treatment of his master, came howling up to the iron gates as if begging for protection. I opened joyfully and welcomed the poor little brute, whose fate was so like mine, and the animal returned my kindness by a love and fidelity far beyond anything found among men.

I called him 'Ami,' and he was in truth my only friend, the only being who shared my solitude. I found an unspeakable pleasure in watching the gambols with which he tried to charm my grief. I delighted in his marks of affection, and I sometimes addressed him as I would a human being. At the sound of my voice he invariably answered with a loud bark. If ever one of you, my readers, has laughed at the love of solitary old-maids for dumb animals, you did wrong; rather pity such demonstrations.

Great must be that hunger of the heart which, when thrown back upon itself, has to seek in the love of an animal the forgetfulness of deluded hopes.

Several weeks passed thus, things went on as usual. One day the sun, rising higher on the horizon, gave more heat; birds were twittering merrily, welcoming the first return of spring, the air was filled with perfume heralding the awakening of Nature. Alarmed at these signs I ran to my ramparts. The ice wall stood immoveable, but upon its glassy surface ran drops of water. With grief and dismay I contemplated this natural effect of heat and the small drops running down seemed to me bitter tears. I stood long buried in thought when suddenly the noise of cracking ice filled the air, and looking up I perceived a narrow crevice at the top of my wall.

I knew it must end this way, but oh, why so soon! All that I had endured was as nothing in comparison with the feeling of terror which this sight awoke in me. Imagining what was in store for me when the sun's rays melted my protecting barrier, I felt a sensation akin to despair. Imagination brought before my eyes a long array of bloody, savage, terrible pictures.

I turned sorrowfully back into my hut. Mechanically I seized my gun and examined it attentively. I could not build hopes of security upon such a weak means of defence, yet the sight of the weapon strengthened my failing spirits. At least I could sell my life dearly.

I still held my gun in my hand, when I heard a great noise outside the ramparts. It was the sound of human voices, the ringing of post-bells, and a loud knocking at the iron gate. I was at the entrance in a second. Oh, joy! The people I saw were some government officials getting out of a post-sleigh, accompanied by two Cossacks on horseback.

No star that ever shone in the sky and pointed out the road to the lost traveller, gave more happiness than I felt at the sight of the golden stars which shone upon the caps and uniforms of my deliverers. The finale of the drama was now at hand. These officials were sent in answer to my petition, and conducted their inquiries honestly, justly, and energetically.

The two convicts, who were strongly suspected of evil designs against me, were sent to another village in the close vicinity of a police-station. The Soltys lost his post on account of incapacity, false representations, and drunk-

enness; and I was allowed to settle in the populous and wealthy village of Balachta.

With one of these officials, Mr. K——, I became well acquainted. In the varied events of my life in Siberia, I had frequent opportunities of meeting him, and in every case his probity and right-mindedness secured me from many evils that my position exposed me to. Even now, after the lapse of many years, our friendship has remained unimpaired; only a short time ago in writing to me Mr. K—— mentioned the circumstances of our first meeting and of my refuge in the snowy fortress.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.

Digitized with financial assistance from

HT Parekh FOUNDATION

An Initiative by HDFC WITH YOU, RIGHT THROUGH

on 15 October, 2018